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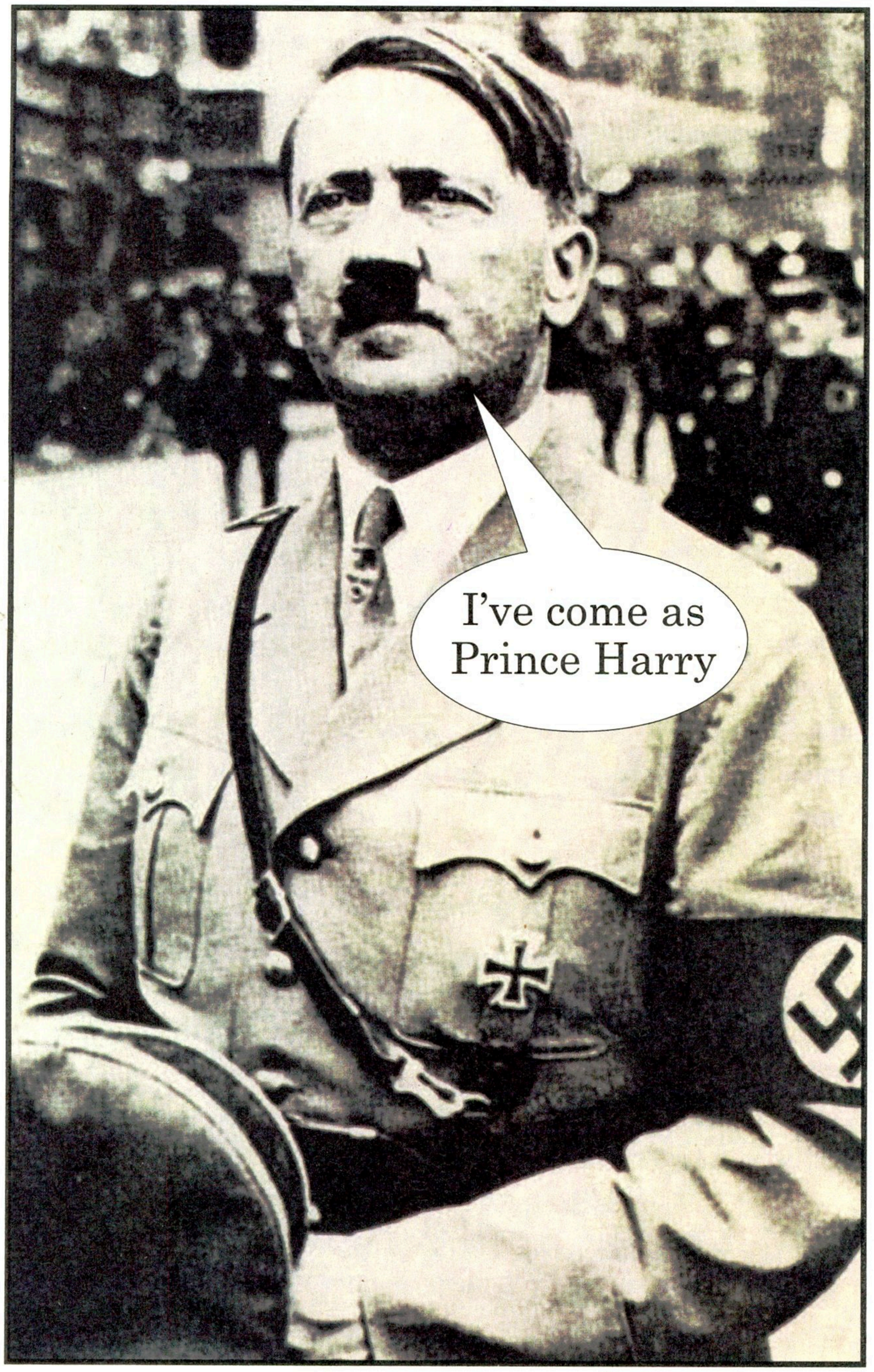

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Gnome

THE HYSTERICAL campaign against 24-hour drinking has no basis whatever in fact. We at Gnome Leisure Taverns have a wealth of experience in the field of inebriation and all our research suggests that 24-hour drinking will make us much, much richer.

At present, the hours in which we are allowed to make money are strictly limited and it is an obvious infringement of human rights for people to be denied the opportunity to give us their money round the clock should they so choose.

I made these points to the ministers in the relevant departments over a friendly drink at one of our regular meetings, and they saw sense as well as the possibility of a large cheque made out to the Labour Party.

So let's raise our glasses to this sensible measure, not to mention vomit into the gutter, urinate in the street and collapse in a heap!

E. Strobes
pp. Lord Gnome
The Priory
London 1 OVA8.

"Two things in life are certain – death and tax cuts"

EDITORIAL
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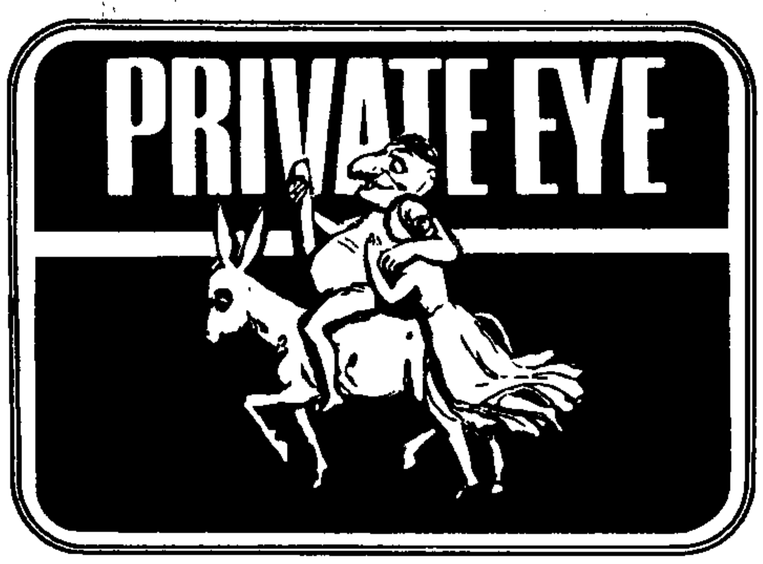
ABC



Hooray Harry

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■ Vote for him? Slicker on TV's Rodney Hylton-Potts 28, 29

"THE police said it would help them police the problems more easily," insisted Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell, defending her plan to extend licensing hours and effectively introduce 24-hour drinking. But which police is she talking about?

Certainly not police chiefs in Merseyside who said they had "considerable concerns" about the plan; nor Nottinghamshire chief constable Steve Green who is expecting "24 hours of hell". The top police officers who met ministers in March last year to express their worries (*Eye* 1102) didn't support Jowell either. And nor did the coppers' union, the Police Federation, whose Metropolitan branch claims "areas will be bereft of police after 2am" as they deal with the night's drinkers.

It seems Jowell is referring to the Association of Chief Police Officers. For as last week's briefing from 10 Downing Street pointed out: "It was ACPO's concern about uniform closing times that was the origin of this action."

Indeed it was; but that was back in the late 1990s and ACPO must now be kicking itself for ever having mentioned the need for staggered closing times at licensed premises. It has been trying to steer ministers away from their 24-hour licensing obsession ever since; and first pointed out the likely increase in crime and disorder in response to a white paper on the plan back in 2000 – not to mention every other time ACPO has been asked for its views ever since.

UNNOTICED in the new year honours list was a knighthood for one Mark Allen, listed merely as a former counsellor to the foreign office. In fact, Allen was until recently the MI6 director responsible for operations in the Middle East – including Iraq.

By the time Lord Butler issued his report last year, MI6 had already conceded that some of its intelligence on the imminent threat from Saddam's WMDs was "flawed" (ie rubbish). As Butler wrote: "Validation of human intelligence sources after the war has thrown doubt on a high proportion of those sources and of their reports." Why didn't the service notice this earlier and realise that its agents in Iraq were duds?

In his evidence to Butler the then MI6 chief Sir Richard Dearlove tried to shift the blame to his subordinates. But if Dearlove was incapable of assessing the reliability of MI6's sources in the region, the same can scarcely be said for Mark Allen, who is widely regarded (not just by himself) as an expert on the Middle East. Yet he too fell down on the job.

Allen had hoped to succeed Dearlove and was apparently miffed when the job went instead to John Scarlett. He left MI6 suddenly last summer, a year ahead of his official retirement date, and took up a job advising the oil giant BP – which has ambitions to do business in Iraq as soon as the security situation improves.

It is unusual for a retired MI6 officer (other than the chief) to be knighted. But as Tony Blair showed by appointing the disgraced Scarlett to the top job, the government has decided that all those responsible for the appalling intelligence failures over Iraq must be honoured and/or promoted – presumably as a reward for their silence. And so… arise, Sir Mark!

THE chancellor's announcement that he will donate all VAT receipts from the sale of the proposed tsunami charity CD to the disaster emergency committee presents a dilemma for Terry Leahy, chief executive of Tesco and Chequers dinner guest of the prime minister who prefers to get a competitive advantage by finding ways to avoid VAT on sales in his shops in the first place.

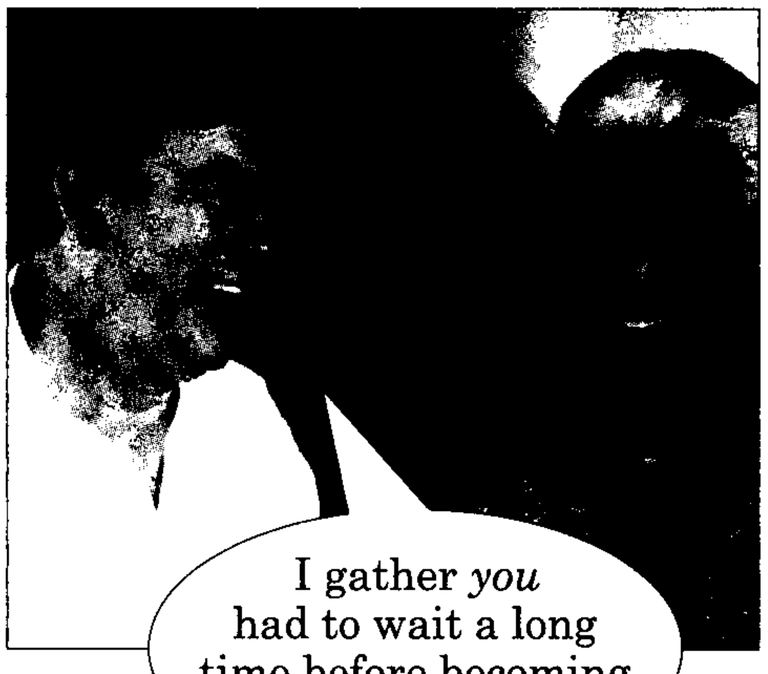
Shortly before Christmas Tesco struck on the clever idea of setting up a company in Jersey specifically to sell CDs and DVDs to British customers. Under European law, punters buying CDs on the internet from their homes in Britain are judged to have done their shopping in Jersey, which doesn't charge VAT; and for items under £18 there is no import duty when the goods are posted to the UK either. Hey presto: tax-free shopping at the expense of taxpayers, courtesy of a grocer that makes around £2bn profits a year.

Mr Leahy's response so far to the tsunami disaster has been to put collection boxes at his stores' customer service desks and donate £100,000 (0.005% of the company's annual profits), a figure dwarfed by the amount his VAT scam has already cost the British taxpayer and the sums it will deprive the tsunami victims of if he sells the charity CD the same way. There is no sign yet that he will take the extraordinary step of selling the CD to British people in Britain in order to add to the funds that Gordon Brown hands over to the charities providing relief.

THE three-minute silence on 5 January to commemorate those killed by the Asian tsunami was observed by nearly every TV channel, including all the rolling news services.

One channel, however, Sky Sports Extra, decided not to participate and went ahead instead with *X-Sport*, its daily extreme sports show. And what item did it run between noon and 12:03? Er, a feature about surfing and the search for the world's biggest waves.

AFRICA: MISSIONARY SEEKS POSITION



NEWS

PROTESTS against the BBC's broadcast of *Jerry Springer: The Opera* were led by the little-known evangelical group Christian Voice, led by ex-builder Stephen Green.

As well as publishing the addresses and home phone numbers of BBC executives on its website, which led to several families receiving death threats, the group organised a gathering by some 1,500 protesters outside TV Centre the night before the broadcast – something of an improvement on the "fewer than 30" people who turned up for the group's last national event, "Harry Hammond day" last October, which was aimed at stopping Bournemouth council turning the resort into a "homosexual Mecca".

Hammond was an anti-gay protester described before his death as "gentle, brave and unworldly" by Peter Hitchens, and as a paranoid schizophrenic by his family, who requested (unsuccessfully) that his name should not be associated with any events organised by Christian Voice.

Prior to being "called by God" to set up Christian Voice in 1994, Green chaired the Conservative Family campaign, managing to cause the resignation of several MPs as sponsors of the group by his description of politicians who voted for the lowering of the gay age of consent in 1994 as "Satan's forces" and his public accusation that Princess Diana was "promoting a homosexual agenda" by her support for Aids charities.

Luckily for Michael Howard, Green has long since abandoned the party as "transparently godless". He now hopes to bring a private prosecution against the BBC under the soon-to-be-abolished blasphemy laws, a case which will hopefully get further than his previous effort, in 1987, to persuade the director of public prosecutions to bring charges under the common law offence of conspiracy to corrupt public morals over an advert for Brut aftershave.

LOW-COST airline Ryanair has brought in m'learned friends in an attempt to stop disgruntled passengers sharing their stories.

Last year Michael Coulston's Italian holiday was ruined when his baggage was sent to the wrong destination by Ryanair and he was left in Ancona with only the clothes he stood up in. Ryanair had been unsympathetic, he claimed, and had charged him £160 to fly home early. This was only refunded after he complained to the *Grauniad*'s consumer page. So he set up a website – www.ryanair.org.uk – for other passengers who had had problems with the Dublin-based airline to let off steam.

Internet service provider ClaraNet cravenly took the site down after receiving a letter from Ryanair's solicitors, Howrey Simon Arnold & White. Coulston was threatened with an injunction preventing further publication of the website and a claim for damages.

Ryanair (whose own website is Ryanair.com) seemed particularly peeved that www.ryanair.org.uk had received many hits – more than 9,500 – and that other passengers had added their own horror stories.

ClaraNet told Coulston the site had been taken down in deference to Ryanair's concern that the domain name and design could be confused with the official site. This seemed unlikely, as Coulston's website states clearly at the top of every page: "This is not the official Ryanair website."

Meanwhile www.ryanair.org.uk is back up and running, for now, courtesy of an ISP in Canada.

Street of Shame

A *MAIL* editorial lambasted the "crashing insensitivity" of Prince Harry, who "thought it a wonderful jape to turn up at that fancy-dress party in a Wehrmacht uniform, complete with Nazi armband... He was making a damned fool of himself and giving intolerable insult to others". Only someone utterly ignorant of history, it claimed, would wear such an outfit for fun.

This surprised older *Mail* hands who recall the "leaving party" held in 1992 for Sir David English, when he was kicked upstairs to be deputy chairman so Paul Dacre could become editor. Since the *Mail* had recently published the Goebbels Diaries, party organiser Rod Gilchrist thought it a wonderful jape to go for a fancy-dress evening with a Nazi theme. Dozens of *Mail* executives and hacks duly turned up in Wehrmacht uniforms. Gilchrist also hired a TV crew to record it all for posterity.

Gilchrist is now deputy editor of the *Mail on Sunday*, and presumably still has a copy of the film. Might this explain why he is unsackable?

"THE tragedy is that Harry is typical of a generation ignorant of our history", declared the *Daily Mail* the day after the young prince was pictured partying in a Nazi uniform.

While Andrew Roberts lectured readers on the "level of ignorance in society about virtually every aspect of the Nazis", Gordon Rayner dug deep into the past to highlight "the touchy subject of the royal family's links to the Nazis".

"Adolf Hitler wore a swastika armband when he met and shook hands with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor in 1937," he pointed out at the head of a list of "fawning images from the Hitler years that the House of Windsor would rather forget".

No doubt it was only lack of space that stopped Rayner pointing out that Hitler was wearing the same garb when he met and shook hands with the *Daily Mail*'s founder, Lord Rothermere, grandfather of the paper's current proprietor, on the first of many occasions in 1934.

Rothermere, who attended several Nazi rallies, assured *Mail* readers that Herr Hitler was "a perfect gentleman" and wrote that under his rule Germany was "beyond all doubt the best governed nation in Europe today", largely because of Hitler's actions in "freeing" the country from the "Israelites of international attachment who had insinuated themselves into key positions in the German administrative machine."

He also insisted that his papers back the fascist cause in Britain, nailing his colours to the mast with the January 1934 headline "HURRAH FOR THE BLACKSHIRTS". Perhaps the *Mail*, as a service to young readers who wish to learn more about their history, could reprint some of their coverage from the time?

A GRAVE warning from Stephen Glover in the *Daily Mail* last Friday about creeping republicanism. "It is no accident," he argued, "that the BBC, which employs more than its fair share of anti-monarchists, should have given Prince Harry's antics so much airtime."

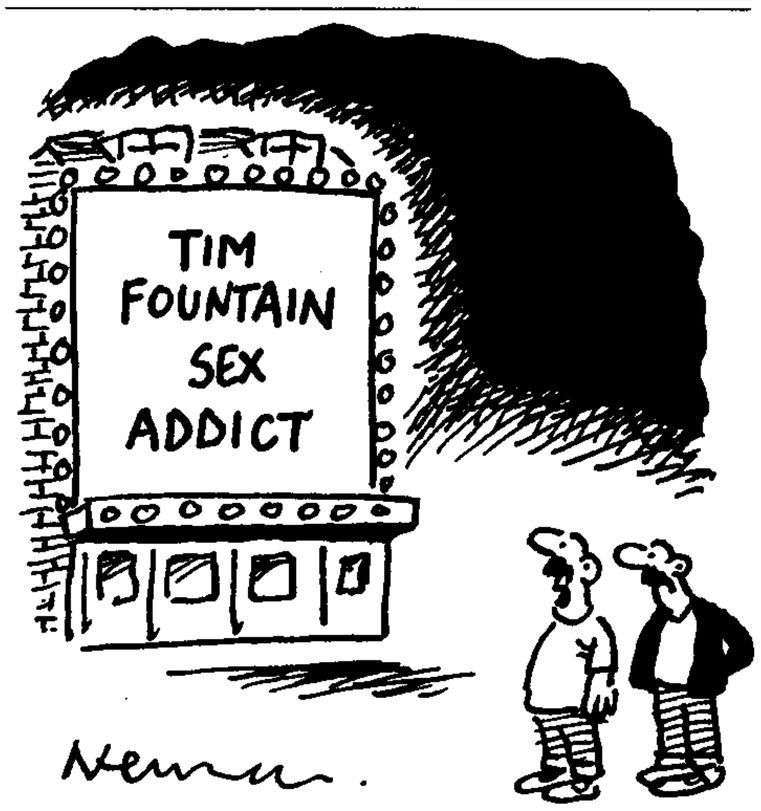
Unlike the royalist *Mail*, where Harry's antics were given merely the first 12 pages.

LAST Thursday the *Daily Express*'s initial reaction to Prince Harry's "astonishing gaffe" was suitably outraged. "This is the worst blunder in a string of embarrassments Harry has caused the royal family," it declared.

A day later, however, the paper seemed less sure. "Some *Daily Express* readers said the prince acted disgracefully, others called for him to be left alone," it reported. Alongside a sympathetic leader-page article by former gossip hack Compton Miller ("Compared to some aristocrats, Harry is a little angel") was a remarkably mild editorial. While other papers were thundering about Harry's "swastika madness", the *Express* opined merely that he had "behaved foolishly" and "been unwisely left to his own counsel". It added: "Whether he did so from sheer thoughtlessness or from a desire to rebel against the constraints of his position only he will know."

Why so mealy-mouthed? Perhaps editor Peter "Mentally" Hill had belatedly remembered that last April, at a meeting of the West Ferry printing company, his boss Richard Desmond goose-stepped up and down the room making Nazi-style "Sieg Heil" salutes before leading *Express* executives in a rendition of "Deutschland Über Alles".

Whether Dirty Des behaved so foolishly from sheer thoughtlessness or from a desire to rebel against the constraints of his position, only he will know.



"It's all about bums on toilet seats"

READERS of the *Sunday Times* Business News on 9 January may have been perplexed to see an amazingly unctuous 1,300-word profile of Fred Goodwin, boss of Royal Bank of Scotland, written by business editor William Lewis and his deputy John Waples.

"Goodwin does not like to boast about RBS's success and he detests the thought of having a high profile," they reported. As Goodwin told the daring duo: "My job is to run the bank, I don't speak at conferences or make speeches telling everyone how brilliant we are. It is not what I am paid to do."

There seemed no particular peg or reason for the piece. So why did Messrs Lewis and Waples – otherwise both highly-regarded financial hacks – write it?

For the answer one need look no further than last November, when Goodwin spent thousands of pounds of RBS shareholders money starting libel proceedings against the *Sunday Times* over a diary item in its business pages. The poor chap was mightily upset and made it known that he would pursue matters to the bitter end, unless the paper printed a fawning profile of him.

Lo and behold, one day after the puff-piece appeared the bank announced that it had settled its libel action, and admitted that part of the settlement was the 1,300-word snow job on the man who so "detests" publicity – except of course when it is on his terms.

"WHAT'S your best piece of holiday advice?" the *Daily Telegraph* travel section asked David Blunkett on 27 November last year, shortly before the world learned that he was the father of Kimberly Quinn's son and had proved his devotion to childcare by taking Kimberly and the "little lad" on holiday.

His reply? "Travelling with small children can lead to tremendous tension, so try to get someone else to look after them."

WHILE the search continues for any senior man in politics or the media who hasn't slept with Kimberly Quinn, the *Eye* can name at least one who is in the clear. Step forward John Humphrys.

Quinn met Humphrys a few years ago when he attended a party in the company of fun-loving Cristina Odone, a presenter of "Thought for the Day". Later that evening, in the ladies' powder-room, Quinn accosted Odone and demanded to know if she was sleeping with the *Today* host. "Certainly not!" Odone replied.

Quinn took this as the green light. She lured Humphrys to the opera a few days later, after which he dropped her off at her house. "But aren't you coming in?" she cooed. "Cristina's not giving it to you, so you can come and get it from me..." A panic-stricken Humphrys sped off.

CAN no one give Piers "Morgan" Moron a proper job, to stop him inflicting his pisspoor column on readers of the London *Evening Standard?*

In his latest offering the disgraced former *Mirror* editor seizes on the court-martial of a British soldier to justify his publication of "the infamous 'hoax' photos that relieved me of my job... I always believed we had opened a can of worms. And now we are going to find out just how deep, and how nasty, that can was".

Why he puts inverted commas around the word "hoax" is a mystery, given that the photos were indeed faked. Equally bizarre is the claim that it was Moron who opened the can of worms. As he well knows, the existence of (genuine) photos of Iraqi prisoners allegedly being tortured by British fusiliers, which led to the current courts martial, was revealed in May 2003 by... the *Sun*.

"Mummy and Daddy have to write horrid stories about each other so that when you grow up we can afford your therapy"

SENSATIONAL news from Monday's *Times*: "A Harley street doctor is setting up Britain's first independent medical school since the start of the NHS."

The Hunter School of Medicine will open in September 2006 on the campus of Brunel University and "is the brainchild of Paul MacLoughlin, former physician to Sir Angus Ogilvy". Noting that all the London medical schools started privately, MacLoughlin suggested that "we're really just going back to a tried and tested formula".

Well, he has certainly tried it before. Readers with very long memories may recall a similarly excited report in the *Guardian* of 19 July 1984, more than 20 years ago: "Britain's first private medical school is planned to open next year in premises formerly occupied by Bedford College in Regent's Park, London. Dr Paul MacLoughlin, a Harley Street doctor, announced yesterday that the school – the Hunter School of Medicine – should take its first 50 students next spring."

By the scheduled opening date of spring 1985 there was no Hunter School of Medicine: despite his confident proclamations, he had failed to get the £2m finance from Barclays bank. No doubt it will all be different this time.

CELEBRITY BIG SISTERS

JULIE Burchill hates Germaine Greer because she once "gratuitously insulted my home-girl Suzanne Moore", so Julie seized the chance to produce a page of insults against Germaine: "as sexlessly sterile as a mule... a rancid bore... Personally, I think she left because she couldn't live with the fact that Jackie Stallone's better looking".

Julie's homegirl Suzanne Moore loathes Vanessa Feltz ("mad") but would agree with Vanessa's assessment of Germaine as a "haughty vitriolic harpie". Suzanne admires Yasmin Alibhai-Brown ("an independent voice"), even though Yasmin disapproves of Suzanne's friend Julie for her "anti-Muslim tirades". But Yasmin does at least despise Germaine for appearing in *Celebrity Big Brother*: "She is disgracing herself... contaminating her reputation... careless and crass... pathetic."

Does Germaine have any defenders in the sisterhood? Only "my friend Janet Street-Porter", whom Germaine praised for her "amazingly courageous bush-tucker trial" a few weeks ago. Janet in turn was "flattered that Germaine Greer has followed my lead and decided that reality television is something to be embraced". But after Germaine's sudden exit Janet thought her "feeble... a depressing sight... she wasn't as tough as I'd thought".

This leaves her with only one supporter – Tony Parsons (an honorary Glenda these days), who told *Mirror* readers on 10 January that his old mate Germaine "can be a gigantic pain in the bum, but she is also tough, smart, capable of great kindness, a bit of a laugh and she knows one end of a chicken from the other". (He added, one day before she walked out, that "my money is on Germaine to win".) But then of course Tony hates Julie, who...

GERMAINE Greer's shortlived stay in the *Big Brother* house came to an end with the professor claiming "naivety". In the course of the show she had realised, she claimed, that the house resembled a "fascist prison" and she was "worried about the object lesson in bullying I appear to have participated in."

It seems odd that it took Greer five years and eight series of the show to realise this, despite the fact that advance publicity for *Big Brother* when it launched in 2000 made much of the fact that it was based on the 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment, in which psychology students assigned the roles of either guards or inmates in a mock jail descended, in the words of Dr Phillip Zimbardo, into behaving "like Nazis."

It was a point made rather eloquently by one academic writing in the *Observer* in June 2001, who pointed out that the show was designed for "people who liked watching torture" and that participants were regularly "condemned to ostracism, one of the most powerful weapons in the human social armoury". Her name? Professor Germaine Greer.

Number crunchings

50 ■ Column inches on front page of *Daily Telegraph* devoted to "Greer quits 'fascist prison' of Big Brother"

11 ■ Column inches on front page of *Daily Telegraph* devoted to "Guantanamo four to be freed"

"Today in woodwork we're going to finish building the school"

Tsunamiballs

■ "EVERYBODY I know, they were very upset this weekend about this... And I actually called our newsdesk on Saturday and said: 'I know that we have this tsunami going on, and – and all these people, but is it true that they broke up?'... I can't believe I'm so invested in this, but I just feel bad." **– Katie Couric on NBC's *Today* show, describing her reaction to the Jennifer Aniston-Brad Pitt separation.**

■ A BULLETIN from the London office of investment bank JP Morgan puts the disaster into a more appealing perspective.

Although the tsunami caused minimal damage to E&O Property's land reclamation project in Penang, it reports, "the real concern is that this incident may cause buyer aversion towards coastal properties at that location, increasing the risk that its maiden launches of terrace houses will not be taken up."

But the Morgan analysts don't expect the tsunamis to have "a lasting negative impact" and urge clients to make the most of E&O Property's deflated share price: "We see opportunity in this adversity and would buy on weakness." Charmingly put.

■ "THE tragic events of the last few weeks lead us to reassess the important things in life," according to an email circular from the Buyagift website. "Now is a time for family, friends and understanding. To quote Marcel Marceau: 'Do not the most moving moments of our lives find us all without words?'" And what could be more important in life than the Buyagift January sale – allowing distraught customers to console themselves with such bargains as a £49 makeover ("includes a haircut or colour from a top stylist"), a helicopter ride for just £39, or the "extreme challenge" of driving a 4x4 jeep over an "awesome" course that features "canals, water features and hills aplenty!"

■ "WE apologise sincerely for any offence caused by our email," writes Lorraine Olden of Adris Computing Concepts. "Obviously this marketing email material was designed by Autodesk's marketing team long before the Asian tsunami disaster."

Maybe so, but the offending email was in fact sent out on 4 January, urging customers to switch from AutoCAD 2001 to AutoCAD 2005 while there was still time – and emphasising the point with a picture of a swimmer about to be engulfed by a vast tidal wave. "Prior to this our managing director, Rob Goddard, had already elected to donate a sizeable sum to the disaster fund," Ms Olden reveals. "In addition to this we will now donate a further 30p for every response we get."

■ SWANSEA council is doing its bit to raise funds for families of the victims. To quote the tactfully worded announcement sent to all council staff last week: "Wales National Pool Swansea challenges you to the 'Tsunami Swimathon'."

LABOUR chief whip Hilary Armstrong and her enforcers leave nothing to chance at regular meetings of the parliamentary Labour party (PLP). For years now, on-message backbenchers have been handed "helpful" questions to ask the prime minister, making it difficult for awkward squad MPs like Paul Flynn, Alice Mahon and Tam Dalyell to put their less-than-helpful questions.

Dalyell, leader of the House, has refused to be cowed and has furiously bombarded Tony Blair with questions on Iraq for nearly two years. So imagine "Black Tam o' the Binns's" surprise when last week's PLP meeting witnessed serial loyalists such as Clare Ward, Clive Soley and Stephen Pound berating Blair and Gordon Brown over their latest public falling out.

Such was the fury at the leadership of the normally on-message MPs that Dalyell's predictable (but safe in the circumstances) broadside over Iraq was met with cries of "whips' plant!"

IT WAS widely assumed that industry secretary Patricia Hewitt watered down changes to the export credit guarantee department's rules on corruption as a sop to the big British firms like BAE Systems that lobbied her so intensely. But it now emerges that some of the shadiest foreign companies also stand to gain greatly from her intervention – at the expense of British taxpayers, naturally.

One of the main changes the companies achieved was a relaxation of the rule that an export guarantee would only be given if the company could assure the ECGD that none of its affiliates was involved in corruption. This would have been be a bit tricky for the giants of British industry with operations around the world, but not half as difficult as it would have been for firms like Kellogg Brown Root (KBR), a British subsidiary of Halliburton, the firm that US vice-president Dick Cheney ran until three years ago and which still pays him.

KBR is part of a consortium under investigation by French and US authorities for bribery when it won a $4bn liquefied natural gas plant construction contract in Nigeria during the Abacha regime. Halliburton itself has been at the centre of numerous allegations concerning its work in Iraq over the last couple of years, most famously for billing the US army for services it didn't provide.

It was therefore surprising when a parliamentary question from Lib Dem trade spokesman Malcolm Bruce revealed that as recently as November last year the ECGD guaranteed an oilfield contract KBR had signed in Kazakhstan. This almost certainly wouldn't have been possible under the anti-corruption measures originally proposed for the ECGD.

Hewitt's change of heart must be a great relief not just to British firms with dodgy records but also to well-connected US companies. Another triumph for the special relationship!

Flawed greatness

SOME of our greatest historical figures have been adulterers. Regrettably, the days have vanished when an ability to do the job in hand came first.

The Times

JACK CUNNINGHAM's decision to retire as Labour MP for Copeland in Cumbria at the next election is no surprise to his party workers.

Ever since Cunningham lost his battle with the boundary commission over its decision to move mainly Tory Keswick into his constituency, thus making it a highly contestable marginal, local Labour party members have been taking bets on his likely departure date.

Making the announcement so close to a general election will allow "new" Labour to select a replacement candidate from an "all wimmin" shortlist. "Wor" Jack, meanwhile, can expect to be in the Dear Leader's dissolution honours' list, allowing him more time to devote to his new role as a director of lobbyist Sovereign Strategy.

Sovereign Strategy is run by another of "Wor" Jack's "friends from the north": former Euro Labour leader Alan Donnelly. Cunningham's decision to join the board while still an MP has even raised eyebrows in the notoriously murky world of lobbying.

PS: Cunningham's decision could have been influenced by other factors too. The notoriously lazy MP was finding the journey between his luxury Chester le Street home in Durham and his impoverished constituency increasingly irksome. The prospect of having to pound the streets in a now marginal constituency would have irked him even more – as would the angry reception from hundreds of Sellafield workers in his constituency who now face the dole.

ANDREW PINDER, the government's recently departed "E-Envoy", has a new job as a director of US computer company Entrust, a firm with contracts with the Office of the E-Envoy.

When senior civil servants take jobs outside Whitehall, they first need clearance from the advisory committee on business appointments. While the committee has offered advice in Pinder's case, most likely setting certain restrictions on his role, Tony Blair has not yet seen fit to pass on the advice.

Last year Blair even overturned the committee's advice when he overruled the "anti-sleaze" watchdog so that Air Chief Marshall Sir John Day could go to work for the military supplier BAE Systems. The fact that Blair is now sitting on the advice over Pinder suggests that he is again considering overruling the watchdog.

Entrust announced Pinder's appointment on 16 November and the cabinet office told *Private Eye* that Pinder asked for permission "to take up an appointment with Entrust on 14 November". The committee clearly needed more than two days to consider any potential conflicts of interest. So it sought further information and "considered it over the Christmas period, and have made their recommendation to the Prime Minister".

The advice could be cleared by the PM immediately if it suggested no restriction on Pinder's job or if Mr Blair accepted the committee's ruling. This suggests the committee said Pinder should delay his appointment or promise not to deal with some UK government departments, and that Blair is considering overruling the advice.

There are certainly potential conflicts of interest as Entrust specialises in internet security and managing online identities, a boom area in Britain where there are plans to put more government services online, computerise NHS records and introduce ID cards.

In April 2003 Pinder announced that Entrust would supply the government's "National Root certificate authority", managing government internet security. According to Pinder, the contract was "a giant leap forward" although the biggest leap seems to have been in his own career. Entrust also supplies encryption for NHS patient files and has a contract with the Land Registry, but hopes to get a great deal more UK business.

Number crunchings

3 ■ Number of members of parliament who have abandoned Conservatives for Labour since 1998

200,000

■ Number of members of party who have abandoned Labour since 1998

MORE on Mark Worthington, the Tory boy awarded an OBE in the recent new year honours list for his *arslikhan* services to Margaret Thatcher (and her son, for whom he acts as spokesman).

One noble cause for which Worthington definitely didn't receive his gong was for care for the infirm. When Thatcher's predecessor Edward Heath collapsed and was rushed to hospital last summer, Worthington could be found sending out text messages to other Thatcherites echoing a famous quote of their Leaderene, "Just rejoice, rejoice!"

MORE on how MPs use their office costs allowance to bombard constituents with unwanted junk mail on House of Commons notepaper.

The latest offender is hyperactive Hazel Blears, aka "Tony's little helper". Residents in her Salford constituency were surprised to receive a missive outlining her stakhanovite role in "pushing through the tough measures of the anti-social behaviour act to deal with thuggish, loutish and criminal behaviour on our streets". Attached to the missive was a questionnaire entitled "Let's Tackle Crime Together", in which constituents were asked to reply yes or no to the following questions: 1. I support plans to introduce an identity card to stop terrorism and identity theft; 2. I support government plans to increase police and community support officer numbers; 3. I want to see new laws against drug dealers; and 4. I support proposals to test drug abusers and get them into treatment."

Respondents were then asked to send the form to Blears with their "optional comments". Happily, one of the forms has found its way to the *Eye* – where one of Blears' constituents has thoughtfully supplied the comment: "Question: is sending sack loads of unsolicited mail containing a questionnaire with simplistic and loaded questions, a good use of taxpayers money? Discuss".

LONDON CALLING

IN THE week that bus ticket prices in London soared by more than 20 percent despite Ken Livingstone's promise that they would be frozen for four years, the mayor's office gave a clue as to where some of his cash and time are being spent.

Six months after the controversial visit of Muslim cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi to City Hall, Livingstone issued a 25-page dossier "comprehensively answering claims" made in the press at the time. Its six-page introduction, written in the first person by the mayor himself, contains an attack on Peter Tatchell, musings on the "agenda on part of the neo-Conservative right in the US", Ariel Sharon's role in the 1982 invasion of the Lebanon, and the racism of the tabloid media.

The rest of the document is devoted to refuting claims made by a coalition of community groups in a dossier last November, which at the time Livingstone refused to accept a copy of, claiming: "I cannot and do not speak for Dr al-Qaradawi."

'Backbiter'

SCOTLAND: DON'T MENTION THE WARK!

IN SCOTLAND, chief minister Jack McConnell is taking most of the flak for his Hogmanay holiday with *Newsnight* presenter Kirsty Wark and her husband Alan Clements at their Majorcan villa. Rival politicians are demanding to know why he failed to declare a similar holiday at Casa Wark in January 2003 – the very month when McConnell's Scottish Executive gave her company Wark Clements an £80,000 contract to create an educational website.

But the real issue is surely the feebleness of the BBC, which has yet to utter a word of public rebuke to Kirsty for compromising its reputation.

As the *Eye* has often noted, Kirsty Wark was a member of the panel which chose Catalan architect Enric Miralles to design the new Scottish parliament. She was appointed to the panel (despite no obvious architectural expertise) by her close friend and neighbour, Donald Dewar. Wark Clements then won a contract to make a BBC documentary about the project. The film, partly financed by grants from Scottish Executive quangos and lottery funds, has earned her company £820,000 so far – though it still hasn't been transmitted.

Last year, as protests about the new building swelled almost as fast as its costs, McConnell set up an inquiry under Lord Fraser, who was assured that he could "leave no stone unturned" in getting to the truth. So Fraser asked Wark's company for interviews they filmed with Dewar and Miralles, both of whom are now dead. She refused – and was supported by McConnell, who said that forcing Wark Clements and the BBC to produce the tapes would be a "danger to democracy". Nevertheless, he claimed he was trying to get the company to hand over the film voluntarily.

"I was under the impression he was making all efforts to allow the tapes to be shown," Lord Fraser now says. "But that was before I knew of the closeness of the relationship. If he was that close and personal with Kirsty Wark, then why wasn't I told? I should have been told." Perhaps McConnell would reply that he thought everyone knew, since the chattering establishment in Scotland is so tiny it's safe to assume everyone knows everyone else. Fraser need look no further than the counsel to his own inquiry, John Campbell QC, who gave Wark what some considered a surprisingly gentle cross-examination: Kirsty, it transpired, was a bridesmaid at his wedding.

In her refusal to hand over the tapes Wark was strongly supported by the then controller of BBC Scotland, John McCormick, who has since been appointed by the Scottish Executive to run the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Meanwhile, another former BBC chieftain and friend of Wark, James Boyle, now chairs the Scottish Executive's cultural commission. Until two years ago Boyle was a board member and consultant at... Wark Clements.

Oh, and Kirsty Wark earned a handsome £9,000 last October for chairing a debate hosted by the quango Scottish Enterprise Glasgow. The directors of Scottish Enterprise Glasgow include one John Boyle, a millionaire businessman and major shareholder in Wark Clements; and, er, Alan Clements, aka Mr Kirsty Wark.

Wark Clements has now been renamed IWC Media, but in every other respect it appears to be business as usual. Last weekend *Scotland on Sunday* obtained an internal memo from Stuart Greig, producer of the notorious documentary on the Scottish parliament, revealing that the four one-hour programmes will include no interviews whatsoever with politicians who have criticised the project!

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

HANS-MARTIN TILLACK, the German journalist from *Stern* magazine whose investigations have so infuriated various European Union institutions (see *Eyes passim*), has been awarded the Leipzig Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media.

The £20,000 prize, which Tillack shares with journalists who have worked in Afghanistan and Chechnya, aims to highlight international reporting where individuals have taken great risks and shown personal commitment.

Tillack became known internationally in March last year when he published an article alleging corruption in the EU statistical office, Eurostat, and was promptly arrested by Belgian police for his troubles. He was accused of bribing an official to obtain inside information (which he denies) and, in the spirit of freedom, police then seized his files, PCs and mobile phones.

Tillack, who says the police raid was a ruse to try to track down and gag the brave and well-intentioned EU officials who were his informants, petitioned the Luxembourg court of the first instance to prevent the European commission and OLAF, the EU's pitiful fraud investigation unit, having access to the data in police hands. The court refused his interim request. At the end of December, however, he appealed against the decision and is optimistic that the European court of justice will overturn what is effectively a legal protection for EU institutions.

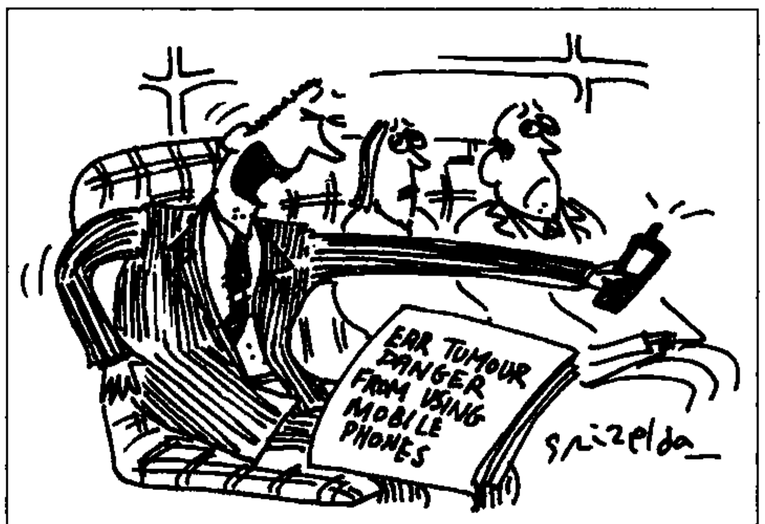
When invited to congratulate Tillack on his award, the office of the new European commissioner for institutional relations and communications strategy declined. Nor was there a warm response from the office of Mr Clean-up, the Estonian Siim Kallas.

THE businessman's friend Peter Mandelson is already doing his bit for deregulation as EU trade commissioner.

Along with his equally commercially-minded colleague Neelie Kroes (competition), Mandy has endorsed a report from the British government's better regulation taskforce (BRTF). The report, *Make it Simple, Make it Better*, was written by a group led by BRTF chairman David Arculus, who also happens to be chairman of mobile phone company mmO2, director of Barclays Bank and chairman of Severn Trent plc (though he resigned from this post on 1 January).

Arculus and colleagues looked at three areas where European regulations play a crucial role: data protection, pollution control and food labelling. Arculus's companies all have a direct interest in the areas examined by the task force. Severn Trent has been described as a "repeat offender" by the environment agency because of its record on water pollution, while in the field of data protection Barclays Bank and mmO2 have obvious commercial interests. Unsurprisingly, the group concluded that rules in these areas should be relaxed and that if any new regulations were proving tricky they should be capable of simplification through "*ad hoc* procedures" rather than through the conventional channels.

They also made a number of recommendations to relax rules in all the areas they looked at. The EU commissioners said that they "particularly welcome the contribution of an independent body such as the BRTF".



"I said I'M ON THE TRAIN!!!"

Down on the Farm

FEW subjects might seem more removed from most people's concerns than the epidemic of TB in Britain's badgers. It is the kind of arcane issue which, when it comes up in the Commons, prompts parliamentary sketch-writers to their loftiest scorn. Yet this year TB will cost the government and taxpayers more money than it has promised towards the tsunami disaster.

Ministers are getting into an almighty mess over this crisis; and they are not being helped by the findings of research in Ireland, which show that the government could solve the problem within months if it had the honesty and courage to do so.

The problem is that as Britain's badger population explodes out of control, so does the incidence of TB – both in badgers and in the cattle among which they live.

Before the 1981 wildlife and countryside act came into force in 1982 and badgers became a protected species, the policy of gassing infected badgers was so successful that TB in Britain's dairy herd was all but eliminated. However, once gassing badgers was outlawed, the population rapidly rose and TB infection among badgers reached epidemic levels – in direct parallel with TB's spread among cattle. As more farmers were forced to kill infected cattle, the bill for compensation rose ever higher.

In 1997 Labour came to power, aided by a £1m donation from the Political Animal Lobby (PAL), which was totally committed to saving badgers. The Maffia's top adviser, Professor John Krebs, confirmed the link between TB in badgers and cattle. But so terrified was the government of taking action that Krebs was asked to spin matters out by carrying out an interminable series of "trials" to make doubly sure the link existed.

By last year crisis point had been reached. As the bill soared ever higher, government projections showed that by 2014 the total cost to the taxpayer will have reached £2bn. As the Tory agriculture spokesman Owen Paterson deluged the government with record numbers of questions, the government played for time. The minister Ben Bradshaw extended the "Krebs trials" to 2008, and also said we must wait for the findings of important research being carried out in Ireland.

These are what have now been published, and they are devastating. In all four counties across Ireland where badgers were culled, the incidence of TB in cattle plummeted – in Donegal to only 4 percent of its previous level. Yet so emotive has the issue of culling badgers become that even the Irish scientists feel forced to conclude that, although it would technically be "feasible" to control TB in cattle by eliminating badgers, it would not for legal or moral reasons be "viable".

This single sentence in the report was seized on by Elaine King of the National Federation of Badger Groups as supporting her view that killing badgers is out of the question. "Apart from the moral and political implications of such a strategy," she says, its effects would not be "large enough to warrant the massive economic cost".

So Mr Bradshaw must stick to his existing policy, even though it has lamentably failed. In other words, we have no alternative but to foot that £2bn bill, paying out more each year than Tony Blair is giving to the tsunami victims, to achieve nothing.

The irony is that if the government licensed farmers to cull infected badgers on their land, they would do the job for free to save their cattle – and a great many sick badgers would be saved from a lingering and painful death.

'Muckspreader'

TV

Celebrity Big Brother (C4)
Vote For Me (ITV1)
Jerry Springer – The Opera (BBC2)

WHILE viewers traditionally begin the year with resolutions to improve, television executives usually see January as an opportunity to show how much worse they can get. Each recent winter has seen the slipping of standards or the introduction of notably brainless new formats.

So, in one sense, 2005 started as executives generally mean to carry on. A programme on BBC2 attracted a record number of complaints; the latest spin-off from *Big Brother* on Channel 4 reached fresh levels of inanity and cruelty; and ITV1 premiered a new programme idea so irresponsible that it threatened to lead to questions in the House of Commons.

And yet, this year, the response was unexpected. Instead of ratings soaring and disgruntled pundits and critics being told they needed to chill and understand the way the culture is going, there was a sense of the medium pausing for thought, perhaps even drawing back from the brink.

Celebrity Big Brother had seemed, like its younger imitator *I'm A Celebrity*, to be going upmarket. Where the jungle show had Janet Street-Porter, *CBB* booked its own mouthy middle-class darling, Professor Germaine Greer. While their was some mystification about her motives for appearing, the attraction to the producers was presumably that she might bring some intellectual credibility to a genre regarded as television's trash-can.

By joining the household, Germs would clean up the show. The programme, though, discovered that it's never sensible to let a critic up on stage. A guest hired to build up the credentials of the programme in fact dismantled them. By walking out and revealing the increasingly tacky cruelties the producers were inflicting on the inmates, Household Germs made the format seem even shabbier and more desperate than it had previously appeared to be. With ratings for *Big Brother* falling among the core audience, the inevitable forthcoming monograph from Prof Greer on the connection between televisual bullying and the collapse of social order end any dreams the genre had of respectability among the cognoscenti.

The success of *IACGMOOH* had suggested that the future of reality TV lay in formats where the contestants were at least roughly recognisable from the beginning. But, with its "star" spin-off now in as much trouble as its civilian original, *Big Brother* may not have to worry too much about new year resolutions for 2006.

Vote For Me, ITV1's big new political format, also seems unlikely to become an election year regular. Sold as a Westminster version of reality TV – sending a contestant into the House – the show aimed to recruit a candidate to stand as an independent in the impending election. However, it ended up mired in a row about the alleged racism of its victor, Rodney Hylton-Potts, and his "castrate all paedophiles" cabbies' manifesto.

The selection panel included John Sargeant cast as a Simon Cowell with even tighter trousers, while Kelvin MacKenzie took the Sharon Osbourne role. Presumably the theory behind the series was that conventional politicians are contemptuous of the public; but the laziest, dumbest parliamentary lardarse would really have to go some to match the disrespect for the political process shown by this programme. A succession of exhibitionists with big mouths and small ideas were paraded before the panel, apparently competing to see if anyone could say anything more stupid and cheaply controversial than MacKenzie.

The original threat had been to run the winner in Blair or Howard's constituency where the incumbent might have run a serious risk of defeat, the politician's main hope being that the election coverage would have made them a bigger reality TV star than the star of ITV1's reality game show. The broadcaster has now seen sense and balked at that. Indeed, realising that politics would not deliver the necessary ratings, *Vote For Me* was even shunted back into the middle of the night. As in *Celebrity Big Brother*, there was a sense that reality TV had gone too far.

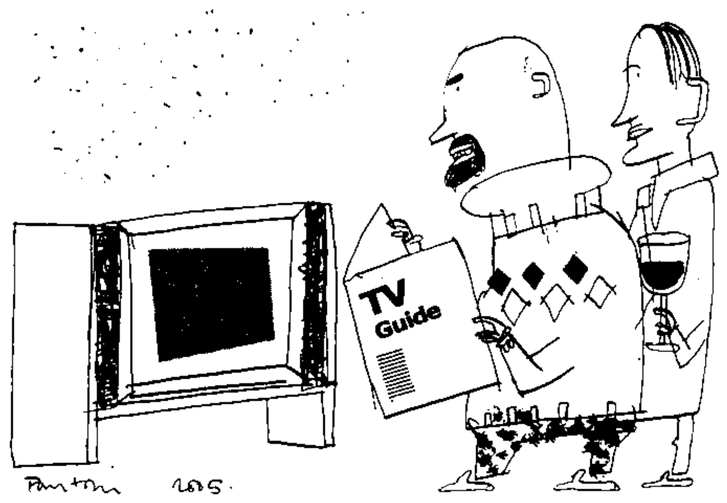
The row about **Jerry Springer – The Opera** is unusually complicated by normal TV standards. Who could have predicted that Melanie Phillips in the *Daily Mail* would have written a coherent and intelligent defence of the show's satirical intentions? And, for all their huffing and puffing, Christian groups are unlikely to be able to mount successful legal action against the BBC and are probably more vulnerable to prosecution themselves for placing home addresses of BBC executives on websites.

Even so, after the cancellation by riots in Birmingham of a play set in a Sikh temple, it's clear that attempted mob-rule by God-squads is a problem that broadcasting will have to face during 2005.

Guidelines and policy documents will be prepared by the BBC. But in fact what went wrong was simply a quirk of scheduling. It was commissioned to be first shown on BBC4 but, when Roly Keating moved to BBC2, he took it with him. The sensible thing would be to run dangerous material on the digital, experimental channels to gauge the reaction, as was done with *Little Britain*, *Nighty Night* and *Bodies*. That would be the commonsense approach: one of several to which television has woken up in a January when the medium was forced to make some unexpected resolutions.

'Remote Controller'

Scenes You Seldom See



"There's no programme about Peter Cook on tonight"

MEDIA NEWS

THE Scottish segment of BBC2's *Newsnight* was introduced in 1999 so viewers north of the border could receive a service that accurately reflected Scotland's devolution.

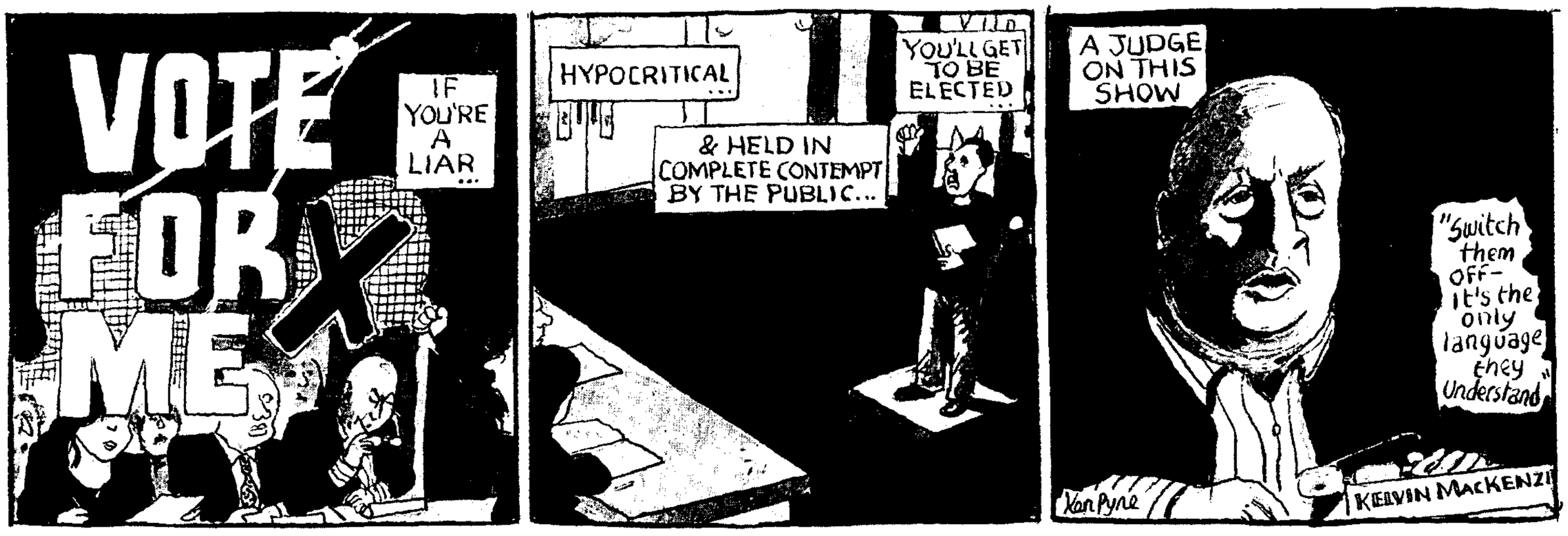
On 6 January that appeared to widen into all-out independence, with the last 15 minutes of the show devoted to the revelations that journalist Kirsty Wark had played host to first minister Jack McConnell and his family in her Spanish villa for Hogmanay.

Presenter Gordon Brewer conducted a heated interview with McConnell's colleague Margaret Curran before informing viewers that "neither the first minister or Kirsty Wark were available for tonight's programme" – despite the fact they had just watched Wark present the first half hour of it.

"IN THE midst of all our American excitement," Graham Norton wrote in his recent autobiography, *So Me*, "we would occasionally remember that we were actually supposed to be thinking up a new show to do on the BBC. At the time of writing we still have no idea what it is, but hopefully when this book is published it'll be on the air and not a complete disaster."

Fat chance. A year after his £3.5m transfer from Channel 4, and months after his book came and went, the BBC is still struggling to find gainful employment for the prancing smut-hound. His one-off programme on *The Sound of Music* was slated; and although he is presenting the forthcoming series *Strictly Dance Fever* (a non-celeb spin-off of *Strictly Come Dancing*) this alone scarcely justifies his vast salary.

So now, bizarrely, he has decided to try his hand at current affairs. Later this month Norton will record the pilot for a show called *The Bigger Picture*, in which a panel of hacks and politicians will discuss the "main topical events and issues" of the week with him, in a studio dominated by a huge LCD screen. (The bigger picture, geddit?)


VOTE FOR ME
IF YOU'RE A LIAR...
HYPOCRITICAL...
& HELD IN COMPLETE CONTEMPT BY THE PUBLIC...
YOU'LL GET TO BE ELECTED...
A JUDGE ON THIS SHOW
"Switch them OFF- it's the only language they understand"
Ken Pyne
KELVIN MacKENZIE

"BROADCASTERS are guilty of destroying television decency", declared the *Daily Express* after the BBC went ahead with its broadcast of *Jerry Springer: The Opera*, over a leader column in which Virginia Blackburn related how "over the past two decades, television has been coarsened to an extent that would have seemed unthinkable to previous generations; sex, violence and a general degree of vulgarity have nowadays become the norm."

Her point was amply demonstrated by the alternative programmes offered on her proprietor Richard Desmond's Television X channel during the Springer broadcast: *Addicted to Anal*, *Anal Diaries*, *Layla Jade: Spunk Sucking Slut* and *New Anal Teens*. How fortunate that most *Express* readers were instead directed to the paper's TV Guide's "Must-See" for that evening – BBC2's *Jerry Springer: The Opera*.

"THE *Sun* is astonished that the BBC is thinking of screening such a show," ranted the paper in an editorial devoted to *Jerry Springer: The Opera*.

"The *Sun* does not think BBC TV is the place for 3,168 F-words and 297 C-words in one weekend show" – that place, presumably, being over on satellite where Rupert can make some money from it.

The paper, was, however, willing to allow readers to make up their own minds in the comfort and privacy of a west end theatre. "If people want to buy theatre tickets for this cult adult show, fine," it declared. "That's their choice and they know exactly what they are getting."

The paper did, however, fail to point out that if they did choose to do so, they could benefit from a cut price ticket offer thanks to a generous and long-running sponsorship of the show by sister TV channel, Sky.

"BBC Springer's a flopera," declared the *Sun* on 10 January, noting that the controversial opera – which it had demanded be dropped from the schedule – had pulled in "only 1.8m viewers".

To put that figure in context, it is 300,000 more people than usually watch BBC2 on a Saturday night; three times as many people as watched the BBC's last televised version of a West End show (*Kiss Me Kate* on Christmas Day); and at 10.8 percent, a higher share of the audience than has ever been achieved by all of the Sky channels put together.

It is also 36 times as many people as complained about the programme being broadcast.

WHY did Simon Hoggart get such an easy ride on the first episode of Radio 4's *News Quiz* to be broadcast since the revelations about his affair with Kimberly Fortier?

Listeners were expecting at least a few jokes from the assembled hard-nosed wits on the subject of a political satirist who shared a mistress with the home secretary. But no. Nothing about Fortier or Blunkett was broadcast at all.

Was this an edict from the new head of Radio 4 who attended the recording? Was it timidity on the part of the new producer? Or was it because Hoggart had bussed in his wife and children to sit in the front row of the audience?

As it turned out this David Mellor-style manoeuvre worked a treat, embarrassing the panellists into awkward silence and Hoggart got off scot-free. Just the sort of behaviour the sketch-writer and columnist would once have attacked with gusto.

A NUMBER of hacks have written to the BBC's in-house newspaper *Ariel* to express unease about the extent of self-congratulation for the way the Beeb handled the tsunami story.

This includes the ludicrous claim that "news teams faced the same logistical problems as aid workers".

AFTER Mark Thatcher pleaded guilty to, er, not very much in connection with the alleged coup plot in Equatorial Guinea last March, most people in the media accept that the prospects of securing a conviction on the more sensational allegations – that he was a key financier and architect of the alleged conspiracy – were remote.

But not so Barrington "Barrie" Penrose, the ex-*Sunday Times* sleuth who is close to the prosecuting authorities in Equatorial Guinea and has threatened potential witnesses on their behalf.

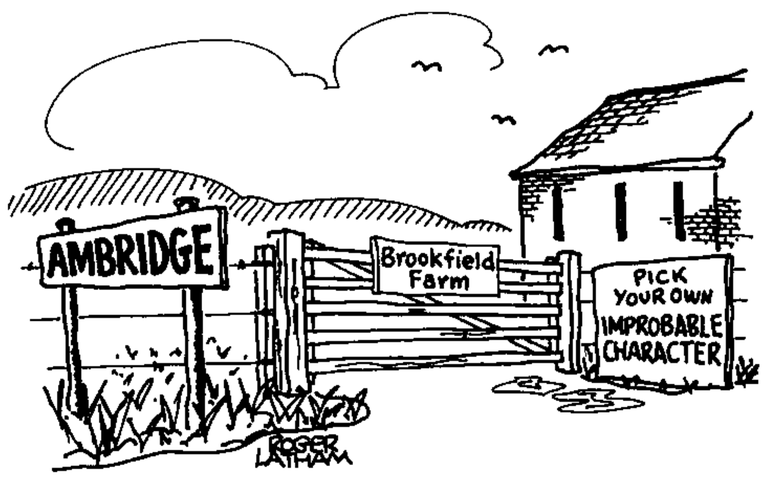
Oddly the BBC's *Today* programme doesn't seem to be aware of this. For when it gave him a platform to sound off against Thatcher and others alleged by the dictatorship to have been involved in the affair, Penrose was introduced simply as "a journalist that [sic] has been following the story from the very beginning".

This was very generous with the actualité; and Penrose was able to go on to make damaging and untrue claims without challenge. Among the more extravagant of his assertions to John Humphrys was: "The fact is… [Thatcher] is not off the hook. He is still being sued in London by the government of Equatorial Guinea, so he still has to face charges and damages and costs here."

In reality Thatcher is not being sued in London by the government of Equatorial Guinea. So what is *Today* up to?

GOING LIVE

"THERE really isn't any power," reported Fiona Trott from Carlisle, reporting on the recent storms for BBC News 24 with a street lamp and Belisha beacon beaming behind her.



BRITISH Sky Broadcasting has denied accusations that it is ripping off customers in a software scam.

Sky+ is alleged to be making a tidy profit by saddling customers with a £65 call-out charge to repair digiboxes that are plagued with a recurring bug that causes recordings to fail for no apparent reason. The fault, which has dragged on for two years, has been further exacerbated by allegations of preferential treatment.

Customers covered under warranty are told that the fault will be fixed automatically via a software update, downloaded by satellite. But those out of warranty are duped into believing that the problem is a hardware fault that requires an engineer to call – at £65 a time.

Private Eye can confirm this discrepancy. On two occasions, calling up as a customer whose digibox was under warranty, we were told that the problem was caused by a known software fault. But in calls claiming to be a customer out of warranty, both times we were told the problem could only be fixed by an engineer and the visit would cost £65.

Sky has so far been unable to explain the discrepancy in advice, but a spokesman stressed the company was "absolutely not" trying to profit by charging for unnecessary call outs.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1/2

Anne Robinson: Which William helped establish the welfare state in Britain?

Contestant: William Conqueror.

Robinson: Single combat is a fight between how many people?

Contestant: One person.

Robinson: In which city is the Scottish parliament situated?

Ex-member of Boyzone: London.

National Lottery, BBC1

Ian Wright: Iago and Desdemona are characters in which Shakespeare play?

Contestant: I did English literature at university. *(Pause.)* Hamlet?

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Is $35 oil the new $25?" — *Financial Times.*

"Random is the new order." — Ad for iPod Shuffle.

"Sleep is the new sex." — *Sunday Times* Style section.

"Bird-watching is the new rock'n'roll." — Philip Schofield, This Morning.

"Internal audit: the new rock and roll." — *Accountancy* magazine.

"Wheat is the new Coca-Cola." — *Sunday Times* Style section.

"Chester – the new Venice?" — Virgin Trains' magazine *Hotline*.

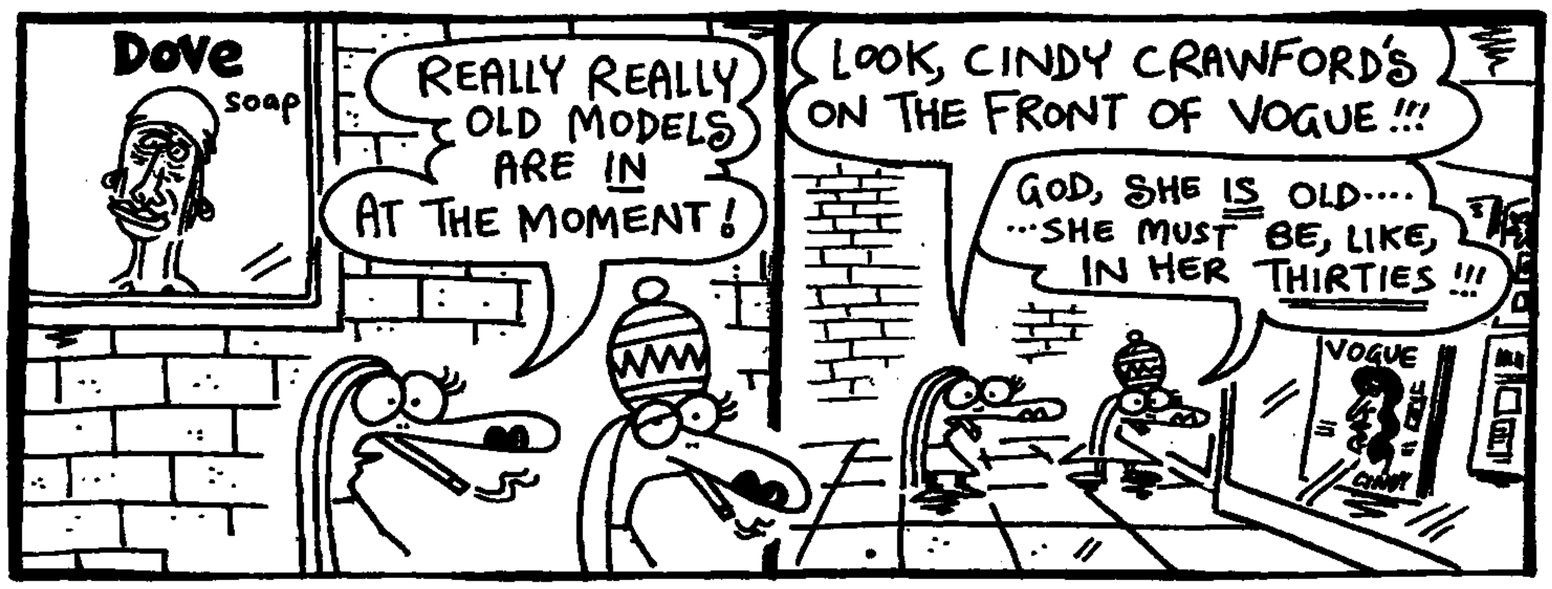
BANKERS

TWO weeks after the UK's biggest ever robbery relieved its Belfast HQ of £26.5m in readies, at the Northern Bank it's business as usual.

Its customers have been sent a helpful leaflet advising them to "think about ATM security", the cover of which assures them that "we're investing to protect you from fraud".

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


Dove
soap
REALLY REALLY OLD MODELS ARE IN AT THE MOMENT!
LOOK, CINDY CRAWFORD'S ON THE FRONT OF VOGUE!!!
GOD, SHE IS OLD.... ...SHE MUST BE, LIKE, IN HER THIRTIES!!!
VOGUE
CINDY

DOING THE ROUNDS

Hip Hop

HEALTH secretary John "Oh fuck not health" Reid has just announced that thousands more NHS operations will be contracted out to the private sector in a bid to cut waiting lists. Travelling for surgery certainly gets you treated more quickly, but is the quality up to scratch?

MD has received plenty of anecdotal reports from NHS consultants claiming that the complication rate of these "fast track" hips and cataracts is worse than in local NHS hospitals; but hard evidence has been lacking. Part of the problem is that operations need to be followed up over a number of years to gauge their success. Another is that "new" Labour, like the Tories before them, are not interested in funding such research. Their obsession is cutting waiting lists at any cost in time for the next election.

Now two orthopaedic surgeons from Exeter, Matthew Hubble and Jac Ciampolini, have followed up 27 hip replacements carried out on 24 patients referred to London for surgery between 1990 and 1993 as part of a waiting list initiative. So far 12 of these hips (44 percent) have required revision surgery. This compares with a published failure rate for local surgery in Exeter at that time of only 4.9 percent. Two of the 24 patients referred to London suffered permanent sciatic nerve palsy compared with none out of 325 operated on in Exeter. Three of those referred had deep infection and a further three are radiologically loose and likely to fail in future.

So why was distant surgery so bad? The researchers give four reasons: inappropriate prosthesis selection; poor surgical technique; lack of accountability; and absence of long-term follow up. "Unlike those patients operated on locally, no medium or long-term follow up was arranged. As a result, patients whose hips have failed often present at a late stage, with extensive bone loss requiring much more prolonged and complex reconstructive surgery... Acute deep infection can be resolved if joint debridement and washout is performed promptly but if delayed, major revision surgery is required."

Reid should take note: his practice of delegating bulk surgical contracts to private, often overseas-owned or operated centres with no local accountability and follow-up could be fatal. As Hubble and Ciampolini put it: "This is the first evidence that major surgery carried out at a distant site may have an inferior outcome, and possibly be of disastrous human and financial cost to the community. We urge the government to address waiting list problems by investing in local infrastructure. Expanding those facilities where properly audited and fully accountable surgeons operate must be the way forward."

M.D. has long warned about the financial peril faced by NHS hospitals by allowing dedicated treatment centres to cherry pick easy, lucrative surgery. The NHS as a whole is already £500m in debt, according to a *Health Service Journal* survey, and local hospitals could be wiped out completely by competition with private providers. Supporters of market competition in the NHS claim it doesn't matter who provides the service so long as it remains free at the point of delivery and treats according to clinical need. But it also needs to be of a high standard and accountable; and until Reid can provide independent evidence of the competence of these new services, they have no place in the NHS.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

THANKS FOR AGREEING TO TAKE PART IN THIS IMPORTANT NEW MEDICAL TRIAL
OF COURSE, YOU WON'T KNOW IF YOU ARE GETTING THE ACTUAL DRUG OR THE PLACEBO
AH, THIS IS THE PATIENT THAT'S NOT COSTING US ANYTHING
UNLESS MANAGEMENT GIVES IT AWAY

SIGNAL FAILURES

Pain in the Pancras

THE shambles at St Pancras station looks like short-term pain for long-term gain but "new" Labour is ensuring pain for years to come.

The Victorian station is being rebuilt so Eurostars from Paris and Brussels can use it from 2007 when the Channel tunnel rail link (CTRL) is finished. The station's original users, passengers on Midland Mainline (Sheffield, Nottingham, Leicester), have been dumped at a temporary terminus since Easter. Their final station will be a long walk from the front of St Pancras and will have just four platforms, limiting extra services. Eurostars will have six giant platforms for business of comparable size. Having agreed to a new hourly St Pancras to Leeds service, the government has changed its mind because of the infrastructure constraints; the £220m fleet of new trains for the service has already been built and now lies idle.

Thameslink passengers are also affected. The cross-Thames service is split into two sections, separated by a 0.6km walk, while the tunnel under St Pancras is turned into a void for a new Thameslink station. Commuters on the long march can at least console themselves with the prospect of the new facilities. Or not: Labour has refused to pay for turning the void into a station.

Its excuse is that the new station is part of the Thameslink 2000 scheme, devised more than 10 years ago but still stalled because of government inertia. Thameslink 2000 would provide more and bigger trains, and services from the city and south of the river would reach Cambridge and Peterborough via connecting tunnels north of St Pancras. Those newly dug tunnels will also remain unused until Thameslink 2000. Without that upgrade package, overcrowding will worsen on tube and Thameslink stations in the vicinity and on the trains.

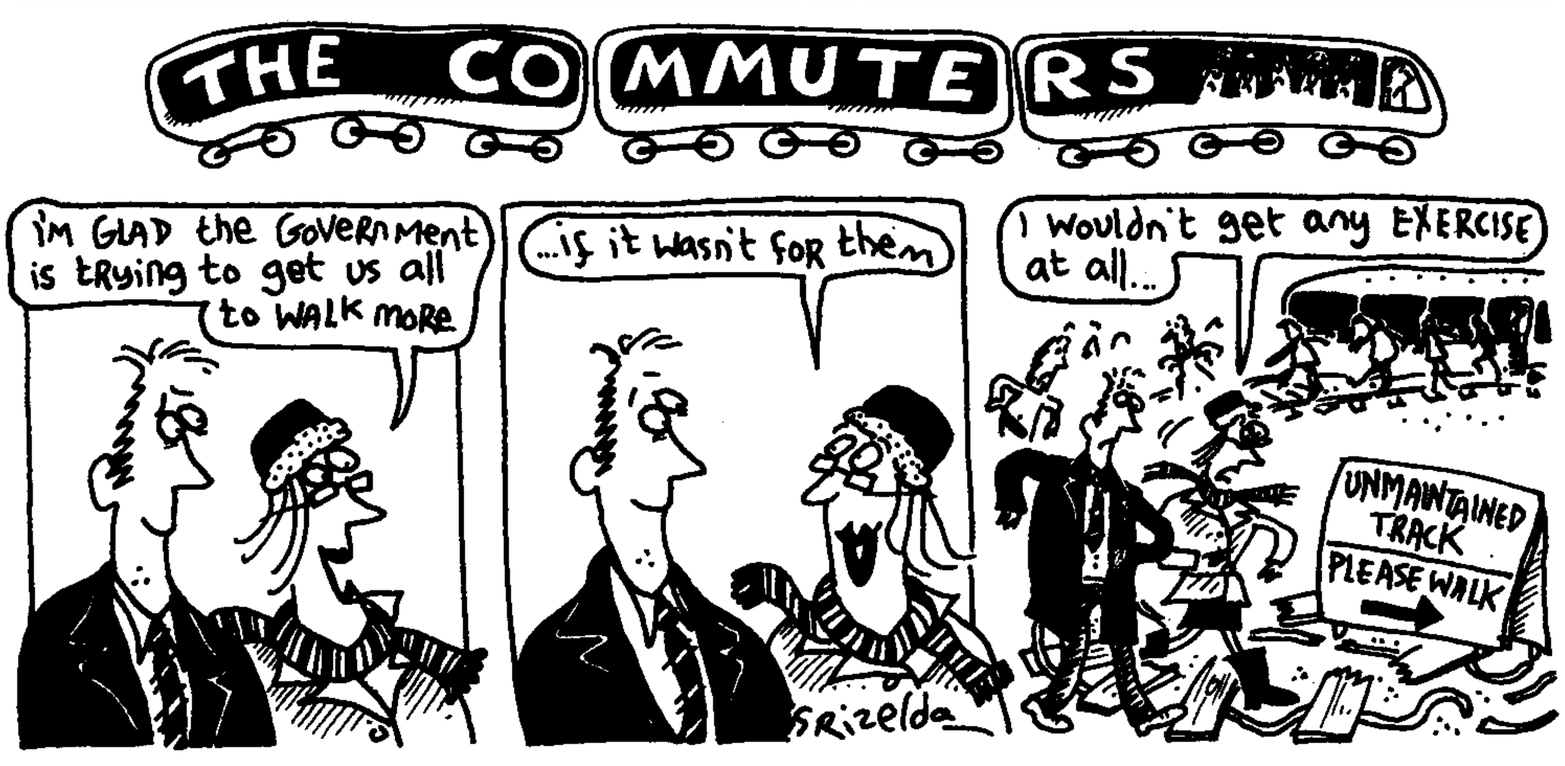
St Pancras' marginal location means many passengers from CTRL trains and other routes will need onward travel by tube. To cater for the bigger crowds an extra underground ticket hall has been designed, north of the existing one, but the government has blocked construction because of concerns about the cost.

All these deferred or abandoned projects are pretty mundane so Labour isn't interested, however necessary they are. High-speed commuter trains to link Kent and London via the CTRL are less important but more glamorous, so the usual questions about cost haven't stopped progress. The choice of Japanese firm Hitachi to build the £200m commuter trains seems to have been stage-managed to generate positive headlines about "bullet trains" coming to England. Normally competition for train orders keeps prices down; but this time Britain's main train builder was told not to bother bidding if it couldn't have trains ready by 2007, an unrealistic deadline. Hitachi is allowed until 2009-10.

Crucially for Labour, those new trains support London's bid for the Olympics in 2012, when they would provide a shuttle to Stratford. But what about the rest of the 30 years they're meant to last? The government assumes masses of Kent commuters will happily pay a premium, on top of some of Europe's highest train fares, to ride at over 100mph to St Pancras (to the platforms now used temporarily by Midland Mainline). But then the commuters face a long walk to tube or Thameslink stations so they can travel like sardines to areas of London served by trains direct from Kent. The crowded, inadequate interchange facilities at St Pancras will be another deterrent. They may also detract from Eurostar, which will abandon its Waterloo station in 2007 and make St Pancras its only terminal in central London.

But unless the CTRL carries huge numbers of people, it won't appear a sensible use of well over £5bn of public funds when numerous worthy rail schemes in England, including a north-south high-speed line, have been ditched or deferred for want of government cash or support.

'Dr B. Ching'


THE COMMUTERS
I'M GLAD the Government is trying to get us all to WALK more
...if it wasn't for them
I wouldn't get any EXERCISE at all...
UNMAINTAINED TRACK
PLEASE WALK
Rizelda

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Performance can be measured by many indicators. Being effective and getting things done is just one."

—Iain Duncan Smith, *Waltham Forest Guardian*, 4 January.

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

NOT KOSHER?

WESTMINSTER council leader Simon Milton and two Tory colleagues met the council's disgraced former leader, Dame Shirley Porter, for a convivial dinner in Tel Aviv at a time when the council was supposed to be pursuing £42m owed by Porter in the aftermath of the "homes for votes" scandal.

In 1996 Porter was surcharged millions of pounds by the district auditor for having corruptly attempted in the 1980s to "buy" votes by selling council homes in marginal wards to people thought likely to vote Tory, while likely Labour voters were moved into safe Labour wards. Porter (estimated fortune £70m) refused to pay. From her home in Israel she claimed she was down to her last £300,000.

In June 2001 Cllr Milton and Tory councillors Robert Davis and Angela Hooper – who both sit on Westminster's "standards" committee – met the impoverished pensioner in Tel Aviv. At the time legal proceedings were still hanging over Dame Shirley, culminating in a final House of Lords ruling later that year that she had to pay up. Milton and his pals were in Israel to attend the wedding of Tory councillor Ian Wilder's daughter. While there they had dinner at a restaurant in Tel Aviv with Dame Shirl and her husband.

Cllr Milton has issued a statement in which he describes Porter as "an old friend and colleague". In June 2001, he says, "Dame Shirley had been cleared of any wrongdoing by the court of appeal... [it] was also fully six months before the start of hearings in the House of Lords which ultimately ruled against her and imposed a surcharge. It was therefore prior to the commencement of any recovery proceedings by the council."

In fact the council's recovery proceedings actually started in 1996, after the auditor imposed the surcharge, and the Lords proceedings began in 1999, when the auditor appealed against the appeal court's decision in Porter's favour. The Lords of course didn't "impose" the surcharge – they merely upheld what had already been set by the auditor in 1996.

Last year, after investigators traced Porter's hidden millions to a network of offshore companies, Dame Shirl did a deal to pay Westminster £12m of what she owed, leaving the taxpayer some £30m out of pocket. The CPS is still considering whether she should be charged with perjury over the £300,000 claim.

Cllr Milton's statement says he "has been publicly critical of the mistakes that were made by Dame Shirley". Good to know that one of the worst examples of deliberate local government corruption on record was a "mistake". Maybe the biggest mistake Porter made, in Tory eyes, was to get caught.

● ST ALBANS in Hertfordshire has its share of problems with late-night drunkenness. So it is heartening that the city's mayor has been leading by example in the battle against booze. Cllr Gordon Myland went on a pub crawl after a council meeting, still wearing his gold chain of office, worth £30,000, and promptly lost it. After drinking wine at the council offices, Cllr Myland and mayoress Patricia Garrard visited city centre pub The Cock before moving on to the late-opening Ice Bar, where the 120-year-old chain went awol. Three days later it was handed in to police by a man who said he had taken the mayor's jacket, with the chain inside it, "by mistake". Perhaps the incident was still preying on the mayor's mind the following week when, following an "incident" at a performance of *Aladdin* for councillors and their families at the Alban Arena, a young female member of staff accused the mayor of verbal and sexual harassment. The council is investigating.

GROVELLING APOLOGY

APTLY-NAMED former Doncaster Unison official Frank Perks made several appearances in this column before stepping down in disgrace last year after being found guilty of harassing a black colleague. After he was mentioned in *Eye* 1020 as a drinking crony of former council leader Colin Wedd, Unison demanded that we apologise to Perks, "a hard-working... dedicated Unison officer". Alas, no apology was forthcoming.

In *Eye* 1033 we told how a Brighton landlady had sent Unison a £500 bill after Perks and others had attempted to purloin a bottle of Bailey's from her bar, smashing a vase in the process, during the 2001 Unison conference.

Now, at long last, an apology *has* been delivered – by Frank Perks! It comes in response to a libel action against him begun by fellow Unison officer Doug Wright over the contents of an election address circulated by Perks when he stood against Wright for a union job in 2002. According to his statement, Perks did not mean to suggest that Wright had "threatened to set fire to his house"; nor that Wright had "stolen from Unison subscriptions by abusing the photocopier and printing up leaflets for his own purpose"; and Perks definitely did not believe that Wright had "lied to, threatened, bullied or intimidated other members of staff." As well as the grovelling apology, Perks has agreed to pay Wright's legal costs.

All is not lost for Perks, however. He continues to be approved as a suitable candidate for Labour in the local elections.

CLUCK OFF

A COMMUNITY website in Richmond-upon-Thames has become the latest victim of the control-freakery of former Tory spin-doctor and chicken-wrestler Alex Aiken.

Eye 1108 told how Westminster council's PR boss Aiken – who as the Tories' head of regional press, wrestled a *Mirror* hack dressed as a giant chicken to the ground during the 1997 election campaign – had built a mini-empire of press offices after Westminster took over the communications department at Richmond council. Within weeks of this unusual £300,000-a-year "outsourcing" – not subject to a proper tendering process – most of the Richmond press officers had been replaced by politicised staff picked by Aiken.

It now appears that Aiken is determined to control all sources of information in the borough. He has taken a dislike to Richmond's long-established independent community website (www.richmond-online.co.uk). The site's volunteers complain that if they contact the press office they are treated uncivilly, calls are not returned and press releases and council minutes withheld.

Richmond-online's offence seems not to lie in its links to bridge clubs, estate agents, girl guides and the like, but in its coverage of local politics. The site carries impartial reports of council proceedings and a well used "vox pop" section where people air their views on local issues. In a sinister twist, some volunteers have learned that Aiken has contacted their employers to insinuate that there is something improper about their involvement in the website. The intimidation has had an effect, for several volunteers have already dropped out. Others, however, have expressed determination that such bullying must not be allowed to succeed.

● A REGIONAL assembly is even less wanted, if that is possible, in the south-east than in the north-east, where voters overwhelmingly rejected the idea last year. Yet John Prescott's fantasy is still being played out, with three months' "public consultation" on the "South East plan" about to begin. Publicity leaflets have been "cascaded" (or, as some say, "posted") to councils, accompanied by a letter from the South East England regional assembly chief executive Paul Bevan. He writes: "The community involvement provisions of Planning Policy Statement II naturally apply as much to the sub-regional dimension as to the regional policies of the Plan. We are anticipating therefore that in facilitating the region-wide consultation locally, the relevant local authorities will also take responsibility for consulting on sub-regional policies applying to their areas, thus providing public input to the continuing sub-regional policy work..." The South East England regional assembly will almost certainly never come about, but Bevan's bid for the 2005 Rotten Boroughs Plain English award looks strong...

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

A UNIQUE project combining research and practical change aimed at improving the health, education, safety and integration of asylum seekers in Salford was launched two years ago by Salford University.

Working closely with the asylum community, the £600,000 Salford Refugee and Asylum Seeker Participatory Action Research (Rapar) project was attracting national and international recognition for its work with refugees from the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa.

But then the academic leader and inspiration behind the project, Dr Rhetta Moran, was suddenly removed from the management board by the project partners, Labour-controlled Salford city council and the Salford primary care trust (PCT). The move has effectively stopped work in its tracks and prompted allegations that money intended to help the socially excluded has been misappropriated.

The council and PCT claimed that the scheme had become "too political". But could this be because neither came out too well in a Rapar report which gave a brutal insight into the day-to-day racism asylum seekers faced in Salford?

The university has protested to deputy prime minister John Prescott because funding for the project came from the government's single regeneration budget. If Salford city council chief executive John Willis refuses their calls for a full and open inquiry into the affair, the local government ombudsman or courts may be asked to intervene.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER

I'M SORRY, GENTLEMEN, BUT I'M GOING TO HAVE TO INFORM THE POLICE OF THE CONTENT OF SOME OF THESE PHOTOGRAPHS
MAN RAY SAME DAY PHOTO SHOP
ALL OF THE STAFF ARE FRANKLY APPALLED AND NOT A LITTLE DISTURBED
PLEASE DON'T INFORM THE AUTHORITIES... WE CONFESS, WE DID TAKE A SNEAKY WEEKEND BREAK IN LANZAROTTE!
AND THOSE CALVIN KLEIN SWIM-SLIPS ARE SO LAST YEAR!

NOOKS and CORNERS

IT IS very tiresome when congregations won't do as they are told. Roman Catholic bishops are nonplussed, then outraged, when the laity decline to acquiesce in the closure of churches – as happened in the case of Hereford, with happy consequences (see *Eyes passim*).

It occurred more recently at St Mary of the Angels, Liverpool: a beautiful building filled with valuable treasures whose doors have now been locked against its congregation by the Archbishop of Liverpool, Patrick Kelly (*Eye* 1053). And something similar is happening in Manchester where, two years ago, it was announced that 15 churches would have to be closed in the diocese of Salford, owing to lack of money and a lack of priests.

A year ago the Church of St Michael in George Leigh Street in Ancoats, Manchester, was closed and its furnishings removed. Naturally there had been virtually no consultation with the congregation as that's not the Roman Catholic way.

Designed by Corbett, Son & Brooks and built in 1858-59, it is a Gothic Revival building of no great merit and was later altered. But what really matters is that it was built – like other churches nearby – to serve one of Manchester's oldest immigrant communities, the Italians, who came to the city in the mid-19th century to work in the cotton mills.

Most of the Italians have since moved out of the area, but they retained their links with the church and have been dismayed at its arbitrary closure. So, to the annoyance and embarrassment of Terence Brain, Bishop of Salford, members of the congregation and their supporters have held a short service on the steps of the locked church each Sunday morning for the last year. They have also raised money for a fighting fund, so perhaps they could have raised money to keep the church open – had they been asked.

St Michael's is certainly not the first Roman Catholic church to close in "Little Italy" in Ancoats. Not far from the stupendous, multi-storey Late Georgian cotton mills that both amazed and appalled visitors to Manchester in the early 19th century is the Roman Catholic church of St Peter. A fine brick building in the Romanesque style, it opened in 1859 and was closed in 1960. After being used as a store, the building was then abandoned to dereliction, like the mills. But now, with the mills, it is being restored with public money as part of the regeneration area known as Ancoats Urban Village.

So "Little Italy" is not a lost cause; and you might think that the diocese would want to maintain a presence in a conspicuous area of urban regeneration – or is it that it would prefer other authorities to look after buildings it cannot be bothered to maintain? The solution is obvious: the congregation of St Michael's should be moved into St Peter's, bringing that much finer building back to life for the wider Italian community. But I don't suppose for one moment that will happen. Meanwhile, good luck to the Sunday morning protesters.

NOT that the Church of England behaves much better... but at least Anglican dioceses are obliged to take notice of congregations and there is a well-established structure of advisory committees designed to prevent damage being done to fine buildings.

That's the theory anyway. The trouble is that, more and more, outside experts are being excluded from diocesan advisory committees which increasingly seem to resent the intervention of amenity societies and seem only concerned to oblige incumbents in their bold plans for the future.

So, for instance, the London diocesan advisory committee seems perfectly happy to see the work of Comper expunged at the Grosvenor Chapel [Eye 1123]. Worse, the church authorities sometimes cannot be bothered to enforce its judgements.

St Mary's, Wyndham Place, Marylebone, is a big Commissioners' Church by Robert Smirke, architect of the British Museum. It has now been taken over by a youthful, "religion free" evangelical congregation. Naturally these cheerful zealots wanted to "refurbish" the church and make it "more accessible and appropriate for present day use." This meant ripping out the pews to make a big clear space for music and glossolalia, and the DAC said fine – so long as the Late Victorian sanctuary and pulpit by A.W. Blomfield were retained intact, along with the war memorial chapel.

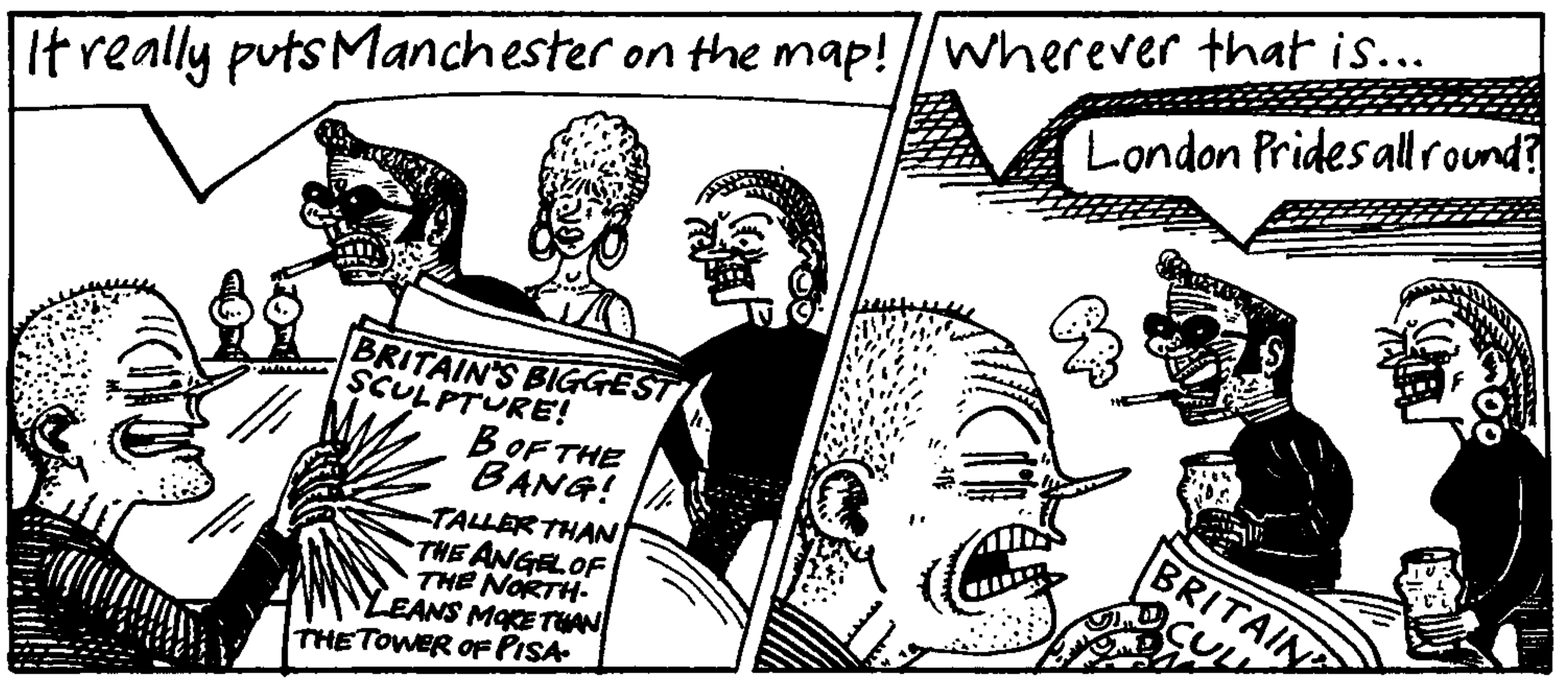
But both were destroyed in the work carried out in 2000-2002 and their fittings removed – all without a "faculty" (ie permission). Will the chancellor of the diocese, Nigel Seed, enforce the DAC's conditions and faculty jurisdiction? Apparently not – which gives the green light for any congregation in London to spoil its church with impunity.

MY PICTURE is a depressing, if predictable one: the last stage in the sad story of the Quay Chapel in Bridlington which suddenly became unstable last year and was partly taken down [*Eye* 1118]. Needless to say, the façade of the chapel has had to go as well. So sad for Dock Lane Properties, who owned the building. I wonder what they will do with the cleared town-centre site?

'Piloti'

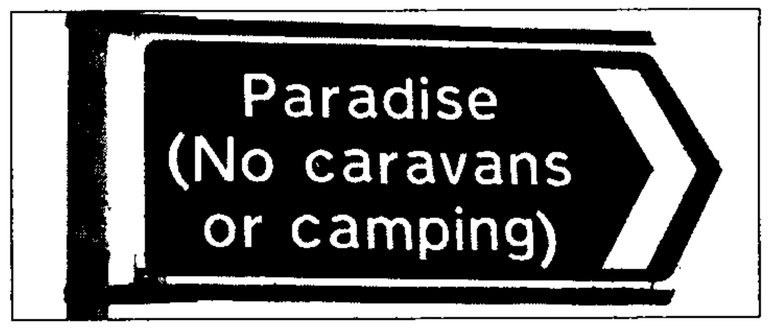
YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


It really puts Manchester on the map!
BRITAIN'S BIGGEST SCULPTURE!
B OF THE BANG!
TALLER THAN THE ANGEL OF THE NORTH.
LEANS MORE THAN THE TOWER OF PISA.
Wherever that is...
London Prides all round?
BRITAIN'S

I-SPY

Cobham, Surrey **(Nick Gould)**



Mablethorpe, Lincs **(Chris Bates)**

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

IF THERE'S one music organisation that's not exactly marching into the new year with confidence it's the valiant, battling, independent record company Hyperion. It has been doing some arithmetic and concluded that it faces collapse unless a long-awaited decision of the court of appeal comes to its rescue.

As already reported in this column, Hyperion was dragged into litigation last year by an academic called Dr Lionel Sawkins who had been engaged to edit some early 18th century music by Michel de Lalande that Hyperion wanted to record. Sawkins was paid the going rate for his work, which amounted to little more than tidying the manuscript into performable condition. But then, to universal surprise, he sued Hyperion for author's royalties over and above the agreed payment, making an extraordinary claim to ownership of the now tidied-up Lalande that no other editor would dream of making. Nonetheless he won his case in the high court – thanks to a surprising decision by Mr Justice Patten – leaving Hyperion with no choice but to appeal.

The absurd thing is that, although Sawkins stands to win no more than £3,000 from his action, the legal costs hanging over Hyperion now exceed £1m. Up to now the British Phonographic Institute has chipped in £50,000; but as Hyperion says, that's no more than a drop in the ocean. The remaining £950,000 will wipe the company out. And as Hyperion is one of the few classical labels still releasing serious new work, in contrast to the bleak succession of crossover discs, film scores, and greatest hits compendia that most of the others are reduced to these days, its collapse would be widely read as a last nail in the coffin of the entire industry.

That this could happen as a consequence of what Hyperion reasonably calls vexatious litigation is contemptible. And vexatious or not, Dr Sawkins is certainly an *enthusiastic* litigant. He claims to have had no problems whatsoever in his editorial relationships with other music companies, but this is not true. And when publications like *BBC Music Magazine* and *Classical Music Magazine* have tried to say so, has he shown himself the reasonable, fair, sweet-minded soul he claims to be? Er no. He's silenced them with threats of seriously expensive days/weeks/months in court.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Service Arrangements for
Christmas and New Year for the
Skye & Lochalsh Area

BURIAL ADMINISTRATION

Emergency contact as per Refuse Collection

West Highland Free Press

Letters

Cover story

Sir,

The cover of your latest issue (1123), defaming our Lord and Saviour, is really quite appalling.

It isn't nearly offensive enough.

Yours,
DAVID DUNNE,
London W1.

Lookalike

McCririck

Bulgaria

Sir,

This striking resemblance seemed uncanny, I felt duty bound to share it.

O. MARCHBANK,
Camden Town.

Transport Watch

Sir,

The Transport Watch advertisement may well have enriched your organ but it pulled off the remarkable feat of containing more misinterpretation, wishful thinking and inaccuracy per column inch than an Iraq dossier!

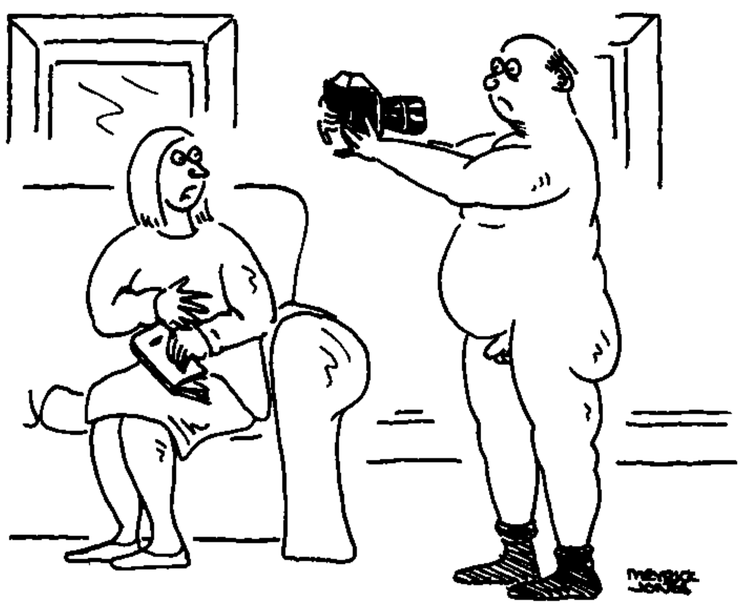
Given this, the claim made by Transport Watch on its website that it aims to become "the non-governmental point of reference for factual data dealing with transport" is surely, at this present time, a little over-ambitious!

HASMITA PATEL,
Via email.

Sir,

I was distressed to see the full-page ad for Transport Watch UK, which wants to tarmac over Britain's railways to create a more "efficient" transport network. I would like to propose instead that Redland Drive, Northampton – where the organisation is based – is converted into a railway line.

Yours,
ANDY HAMILTON,
Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham.



"Maybe doing a nude calendar isn't the best way of helping the tsunami victims..."

Scottish missed

Sir,

Further to your article about ID cards and citizens of the Irish Republic not having to carry them in the UK, I have just had a letter from my local MP, Bob Laxton (Derby North), in reply to one of mine objecting to the introduction of compulsory ID cards, in which he says "Home Secretary Charles Clarke has said that ID cards will be compulsory, except in Scotland, where the decision will be taken by the devolved administration".

So, if the Scottish administration decides against compulsory ID cards, the UK parliament will introduce them for people living in England and Wales, who of course will enjoy the benefits of being watched by the state all the time, whilst McAl-Qaeda will be able to operate with impunity north of the border...

Yours,
NICK WRAY,
Derby.

Blooming cheek

Sir,

Whilst flattered to receive any form of award, and we receive many, I am afraid we cannot accept your Rotten Boroughs Health and Safety Award for banning hanging baskets in Bury St Edmunds, as we never did ban them.

The briefest of journalistic researches would have made clear that there never was a ban, nor will there be one; in fact we helped Bury in Bloom to organise their biggest ever basket display with more sites than ever before. Sadly this research was not carried out by the Sun, Daily Express, Telegraph and many other papers who have built their stories around a complete myth.

To confirm the facts I would be happy to take the time to personally show Lord Strobes, or even Ian Hislop, every single lamppost in Bury capable of bearing baskets. Safely.

A correction in your worthy organ would be treasured by all the good people of Suffolk.

Yours sincerely,
CLLR. JULIAN SWAINSON,
Via email.

"No, no, sir! Not that way! That way lies madness!"

Economist with the truth

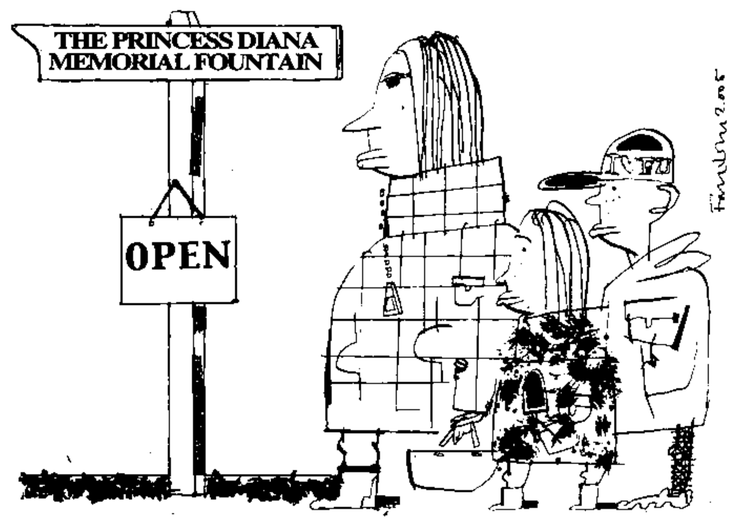
Sir,

Lovely to meet you at a Private Eye lunch a few months ago. You were clearly fascinated to hear about my work at The Economist. I made such an impression that you forgot that it was I who have been working on nanotechnology. What makes the Street of Shame this week so tragic is that my ten-page survey is not anonymous at all. It is the only bylined piece I've written for The Economist in over four years! Thanks, guys!

Tom Standage (technology editor) is blameless. While I was working on the survey he happened to mention that Ella had been watching an episode of the PowerPuff girls where they battle an evil swarm of nanobots. And that she'd later had a nightmare about nanobots where he'd had to explain that they were not real. As I believe journalists are sometimes inclined to do, they report information that they hear. I thought it was rather a good introduction myself.

Regards,
NATASHA LODER,
Science & Technology Correspondent, The Economist.

Scenes You Seldom See



Some mis-Stoke, surely?

Sir,

I was very surprised to read in HP Sauce (1123) that Rob Flello had been selected for Stoke South. After all, the same HP Sauce suggested a few months ago that Alastair Campbell would be parachuted into the seat.

Yours faithfully,
R.J. BRIAND,
Leek, Staffs.

Virtually meaningless

Sir,

The Chief Executive of the National Offender Management Service, Martin Narey's, claims in the last issue of the Eye are quite extraordinary. The NOMS will not be functional, if at all, until April 2007, yet he claims that this virtual organisation has halted the rise in custody. Perhaps the answer to crime, therefore, is to create virtual police officers. The real reason for the welcome stabilisation of the prison population is repeated exhortations from the lord chief justice, and belatedly the home secretary, for the courts not to jail so many less serious offenders.

NOMS meanwhile jumps from crisis to crisis, and one year on from the announcement that NOMS was to happen there is still no business case, no job description for senior staff and seemingly no organisational detail.

Martin Narey also claims that he is meeting scores of probation staff all over the country who feel that their lives have been transformed by the creation of this organisation. In all probability they are virtual as well.

Yours sincerely,
HARRY FLETCHER,
Assistant General Secretary, NAPO, London SW11.

Welsh wails

Annwyl Private Eye,

I was wondering how long it would take you before having a dig at the Wales millennium centre (Media News, Eye 1123). The centre is not a "pile"; it is a permanent building of architectural merit. It will host high art – opera, classical music and so on – as well as more populist, quality fare such as Cirque Eloize (which is the correct spelling, by the way). It cost £105m and receives a grant of £2m a year.

The millennium dome, on the other hand, is a tent which held a distressing muddle of lowbrow twaddle. It cost £800m. In other words, it will be another 347 years and six months before the Wales millennium centre costs as much as that pile in your capital city.

Dymuniadau gorau.

Yr eiddoch yn gywir,
HUW ROBERTS,
Creigiau, Caerdydd.

A science writer writes...

Sir,

Thank you so much for drawing attention to our excellent Science Writers' Awards scheme in last week's issue (1123). You suggested that it might somehow be improper for a GM company to sponsor the occasion: commercial sponsorship is fairly common for media prize schemes. What's important is that the scheme is independent. Our awards are judged by fellow science journalists and leading independent researchers. Many of our entries are from those who have drawn attention to questionable practices of science-based multinational corporations and individual scientists.

Unfortunately, though, we don't get enough of these kind of entries: too many of our number still regard their job as a translation service for scientists rather than to question what those scientists say and do. One of the aims of our awards is to encourage reporters to cover science in a more kick-ass, challenging way, as the best journalists in other sectors cover their specialist areas. I hope that the recent introduction of a new prize for investigative science journalism in our awards scheme will encourage this trend.

Yours faithfully,
PALAB GHOSH,
Chairman, Association of British Science Writers.

Lookalike

Pollard

Pollard

Sir,

I wonder if your readers have noticed the spooky resemblance between Stephen Pollard, David Blunkett's biographer, and Vicky "Yeah but no but" Pollard, of Little Britain fame? I guess the name should have provided the clue that they are, perhaps, related.

ENA B. PRICE,
North London.

Bully for Benjamin

Sir,

*Can't agree with your implying Benjamin Zephaniah is guilty of knee-jerk "racism" shouting. Any time I've ever heard him he's always been reasonable, and if he **has** mentioned stuff that happened to him that was disagreeable, it is easy to see it was.*

Keep up the good work,

TONI GUTMAN,
London.

What Katy did next

Sir,

In your reportage of the ongoing efforts of Richard Olzweski to gain the nomination as PPC for Labour in North Ayrshire, you recently described the ultimate victor, Ms Katy Clark, as a "left-wing trade unionist" (HP Sauce, Eye 1123). In a previous edition, however, you described Ms Clark as a "Blairite". Would the real Katy Clark please stand up?

DAVID STEVENSON,
Cambuslang.

"So much for us having the same attitude towards it as the Continentals"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The Watford fans have thrown graffiti on the pitch."
Commentator, Radio 5 Live
(James Holleyhead)

"The only way I can spend is to buy."
KEVIN KEEGAN, Radio 5 Live
(Adrian Last)

"Sinn Fein are the same sides of different coins."
BILL LOWRY, Radio 4
(Robert Rawson)

"If Everton finish in a Champions League place, they'll play in the Champions League."
MARK BRIGHT, Radio 5 Live
(Ben Stokes)

"So, this movie you star in, The Life Story of George Best – tell us, what is it about?"
GEORGE GAVIN, Sky Sports
(David Clorley)

SOLUTIONS

"Northern Foods... serving consumers across the full range of eating occasions from treats and snacks to full meal solutions" — *food*

"Compass Group... developing and delivering original food and service solutions" — *school dinners*

"Feed Rapide Grab & Go Solutions" — *vending machine snacks*

"Raytheon: Mission Solutions for the Warfighter" — *weapons*

"PJ Combustion Solutions — *incineration and crematoria equipment*"

All submitted by readers

Billingsgate

Sir,

In reply to your report in Private Eye 1122 I can assure you that the Rev Dr Alan Billings does not need a helping hand from any member of the Labour government to have got him the offices he has been appointed to. Just because he is standing by his oldest friend, in his time of need, doesn't mean he should have to take the small-minded comments like the ones you are implying.

Rev Dr Alan Billings is a very intelligent person, and anyone who has been privileged to have heard him preach or speak in public would agree that he deserves to hold the positions he has by WHAT he knows not WHO.

V. CARRADUS,
Kendal, Cumbria.

Wave power

Sir,

Diego Garcia is no safer than anywhere else in the Indian Ocean. It was left "relatively unscathed" by the recent tsunami as the wave propagated mainly east-west. In relation Diego Garcia lies well to the south of the epicentre, accordingly is just experienced a modest "tidal surge".

ANDY ROSS,
Via email.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

I am appalled at the way some newspapers seek to belittle our Prime Minister just because he has recently taken to wearing a vest. It is not unusual for prominent figures to do so. I wonder if you might have any pictures in your files which might illustrate this?

Yours,
KEITH BAKER,
Via email.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

This new organization will enable Johnson & Johnson to better address the needs of patients around the world who require treatment for heart failure and sudden cardiac death.

Johnson & Johnson Press Release

Letter from **Tegucigalpa**

from Our Own Correspondent

REJOICE! We won our own "War on Terror". That, at least, is what President Ricardo Maduro told Honduras last October.

He meant our war on the *maras*, the powerful criminal gangs who plague Central America from LA to Medellín. Alas, it seems the gangs themselves have yet to learn of their defeat. Two days before Christmas, members of the *Mara Salvatrucha* in San Pedro Sula, our second city, held up a bus full of commuters, shoppers and children. They sprayed the bus thoroughly with AK47s, M16s and automatics. Twenty seven ordinary, innocent people were killed; another 28 injured. Then the gunmen drove away. It was a gruesome act, even by Honduran standards, and the entire country remains shaken.

Rather like another "War on Terror", then, this one is not quite so "over" as we were led to believe. And there's nothing like such a war to distract our attention from more day to day issues – such as the fact that, thanks largely to systemic corruption, Honduras is now the second poorest country in the western Hemisphere after that hell-on-earth formerly known as Haiti. Easier to blame the *maras* for all our ills, and insist that once they are obliterated, all our problems will be solved.

No one likes the *maras,* obviously. They slaughter ordinary Hondurans for kicks. They behead kidnapped policemen and leave their heads in public places – on the back seats of buses is a favourite. Two years ago they shot dead Maduro's 19-year-old son in a car ambush. There's no reason to suppose Maduro felt any differently about such an event than any other father would, but it did give him free rein to pursue the criminal gangs by whatever means necessary – including the dread spectre of summary and extra-judicial execution, which so haunted Central America in the 1980s. The massacre in San Pedro has only strengthened Maduro's hand.

It's already an offence to sport tattoos: incontrovertible evidence of gang membership, y'see, and punishable by up to six years in jail. And once in jail, the tattooed felon will have to endure all those mysterious prison fires which keep breaking out. A recent blaze burned alive 147 gang members, 61 of whom had never been convicted of a crime. The jailers afterwards explained "the doors were too hot for us to open" and "we couldn't find the key".

The main reason the *maras* remain so powerful, despite our leaders' most ruthless efforts, is because they're so damn rich. AK47s and M16s don't come cheap, even in our gun-rich, money-poor country. And they're rich because of drugs: key players in the hugely profitable traffic of cocaine from Colombia via Central America to the US, or else to the Caribbean and so on to the greedy, pampered little noses of Europe.

So thank you for your drugs money, self-appointed first world! Another thoughtful donation to our ailing country, along with military hardware and paedophile tourists.

We are told here that at some of your glossy media clubs and dinner parties in London, an after-dinner toot has nowadays taken the place of your traditional "English pudding" among the chattering classes – the very same people who claim to care so deeply about the poor third world. Rather than chopping out their lines on the latest world-music CD, perhaps these enlightened individuals should chop them out instead on a photo of a Honduran bus, decorated with the slogan *Dios es Amor,* but pockmarked with bulletholes and with the bloodstained dead lying in the road alongside: Jesús Domínguez, aged 45; María Anita Portillo, aged 14; Alexander Gutiérrez, aged seven; Javier Barahona, aged two. After all, who paid for the bullets?

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "As an offering to the Nine Emperor Gods, I shall now allow myself to be cooked in this giant wok, together with dumplings and root vegetables," Lim Boon Hwa told a thousand onlookers at a Taoist festival in the Malaysian state of Kedah. "I will stay in the pot for at least thirty minutes, and will not get out until the dumplings and corn are cooked through. You will then be able to judge the strength of my devotion by eating the stew, which I hope you will enjoy."

With that, fifty-six-year-old Lim climbed into an enormous steaming wok, and sat cross-legged on a wooden board inside. After placing a lid on the wok, temple caretaker Goon Fook Theong told the crowd, "This is the fourth time that Lim has been cooked, and he has always survived. His performance shows the greatness of the Taoist deities in protecting their devotees from harm. Other devotees make their offerings in different ways, such as walking on hot coals, or throwing themselves onto broken glass, but Lim has always preferred to be cooked, because this way he can also help to feed the worshippers."

Thirty minutes later, the lid was removed, Lim emerged unharmed, and the cooked stew was distributed to the spectators. "Not bad, but it is still a little underdone," said one onlooker. "Last year, Lim stayed in for forty-five minutes, and wore his slippers, and it tasted much meatier." *(The Hindustani Times, 20/10/04. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*

– ● –

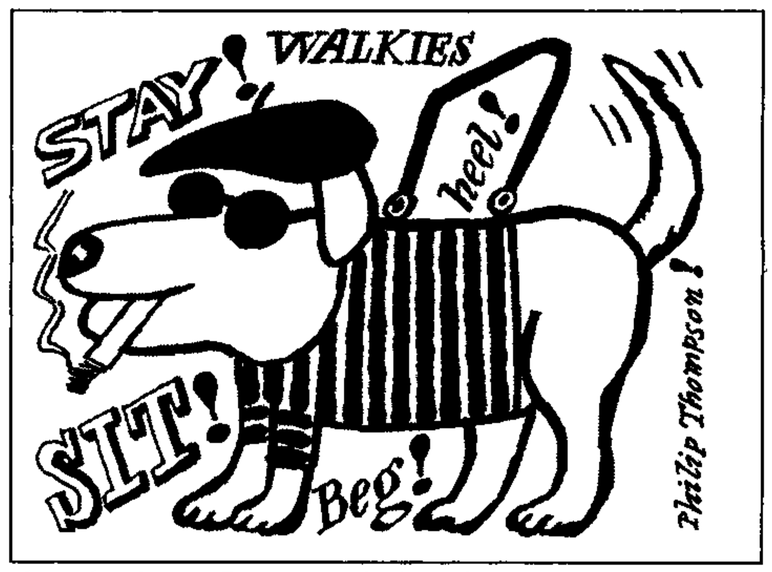
● *"Yellow Pages is full of businesses with ingenious names, and we simply wanted to recognise and reward the best," Richard Duggleby of Yell Publications told a press conference in Glasgow. "So we appointed a panel of psychologists and linguists to read through all the directories in Britain, looking for originality, cleverness, relevance, and humour in the names, and have awarded the following prizes.*

"Runners up for Best Business Name 2004 include: Secsinthecity, a London recruitment agency; a Birmingham greengrocer called Melon Cauli; Aquaholics, a diving shop in Northern Ireland; a musical instrument shop in Aire, Yorkshire, called Aire Guitars; The Vinyl Resting Place, a record shop in Croydon; and a Newcastle corporate entertainment business called Amp & Decks. The Scottish winners were a house clearance company in Arbroath called Klepto & Son. And the overall British winner is a small ironing business in Bristol called Crease Lightning, run by a woman who is a massive fan of the musical Grease, and wears her hair like Olivia Newton-John." (Yell Press Release, 11/10/04. Spotter: Ivan Macquisten)

– ● –

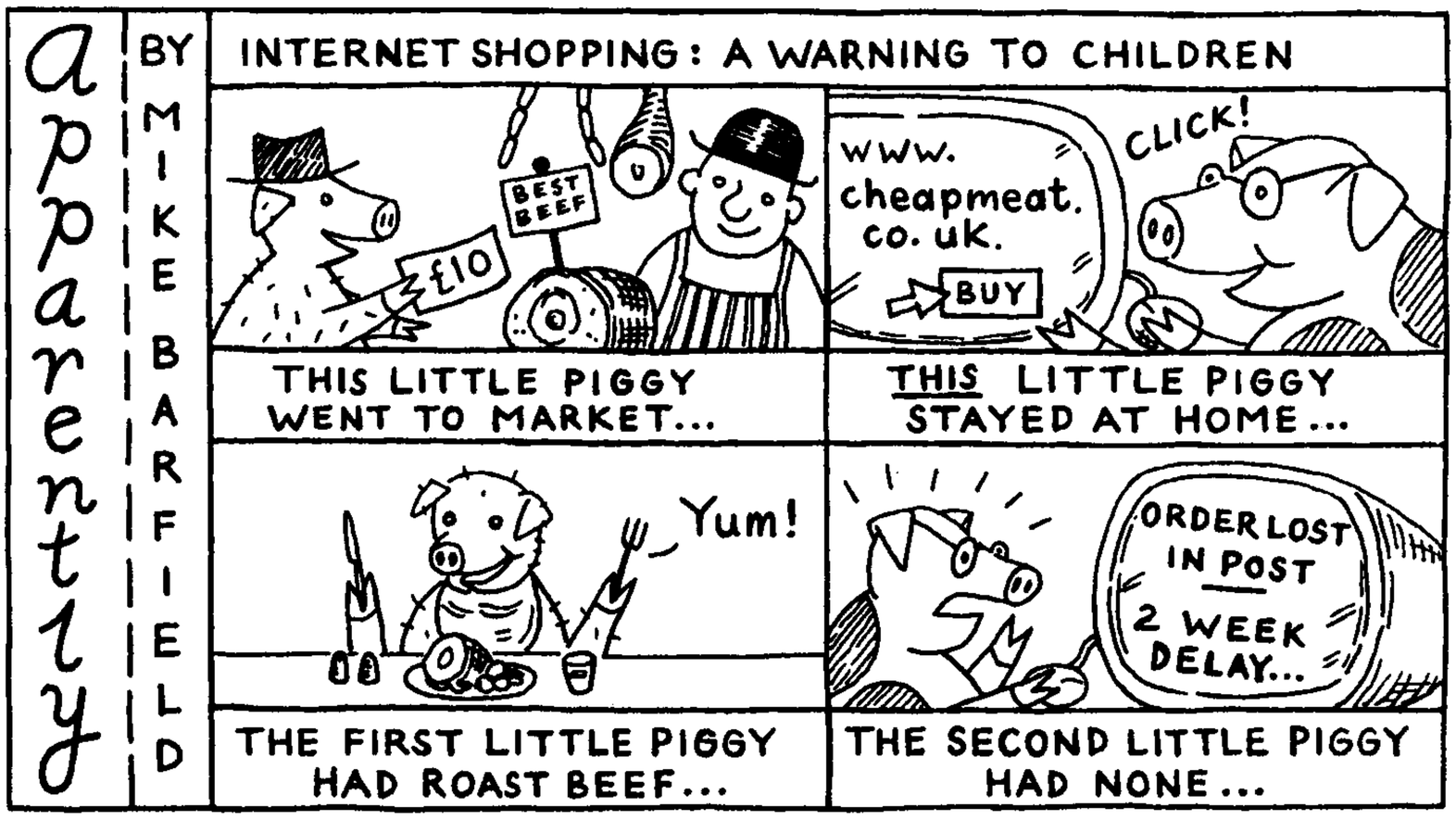
● "As a blind man, I'm used to discrimination," Yvan Tessier told reporters at the University of New Brunswick, "but I never expected to encounter it here. I asked to enrol on the university's intensive English language course, and was all ready to start, when I was suddenly told that I'd been rejected. Why? Because Pavarotti, my guide dog, only understands French."

University spokesperson Susan Mesheau defended the decision, saying that "it's essential on these courses that all communication is in English. And Mr Tessier has admitted that his dog understands only French. With enough notice, we could probably have trained the dog to learn some English commands, and once it was bilingual, its master could then have taken the English course. We've done



that before. But until the dog is trained, Mr Tessier cannot enrol here, unless he leaves it at home."

But Mr Tessier has vowed to lodge a human rights complaint against the university, saying "this is prejudice against me and against Pavarotti. I have about twenty commands that I give him in French, and he understands those perfectly well, so why should he have to learn English? Anyway, when I'm in a class or a discussion, I hardly ever talk to him, so why have I been banned?" *(Canada East, August 2004. Spotter: Richard Felski)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

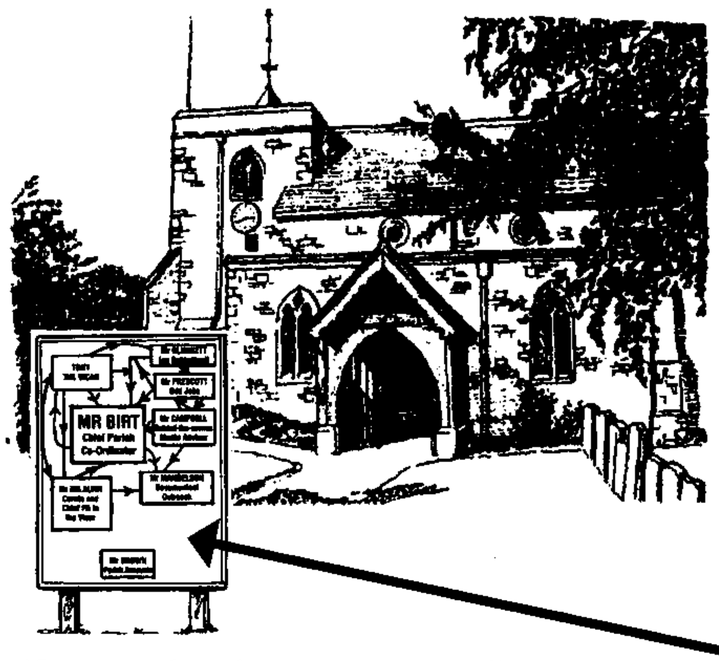
Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

A VERY IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Some confusion has recently arisen over who does what at the top of our parish organisation.

I have therefore appointed Mr Birt as Chief Parish Co-ordinator. This is a new post, the holder of which will exercise many of the responsibilities formerly shouldered by other members of the PCC (no offence, guys, it's just a case of 'moving on'!)

As you know, I have become increasingly reliant on John's advice on how to simplify the procedures of parish administration, whether it be the drawing up of the flower roster, re-organisation of our system for the dispensing of coffee and biscuits after Sunday services or the allocation of priority parking spaces for the disabled and for senior members of the PCC in the church car park



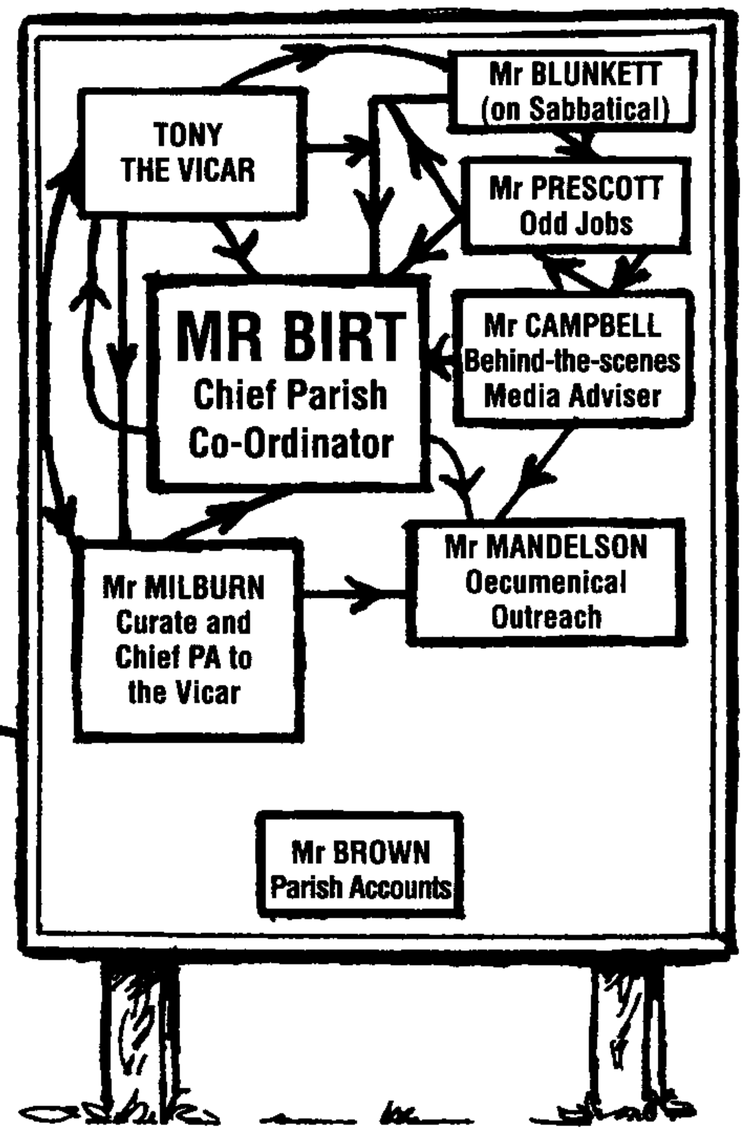
(formerly the graveyard).

This is why I have now asked John to move into the vicarage on a permanent basis – up in the attic, so he can do his blue sky thinking".

So over to you John, for a bit of your "structural re-engineering"!!!

T.B.

St Albion's Team Ministry
HOW IT NOW WORKS



Hullo!

And I don't mind admitting that the start of this year has been a highly invigorating (if somewhat humbling) experience!

Over the years, I've got rather used to standing up in the pulpit and preaching to all of you.

So when the tables were turned at our recent special meeting in the Church Hall, it was something of a shock to have to listen to all of you lecturing me!

And, as I sat there while you told me that our treasurer, Mr Brown, and I should stop our constant bickering, goodness me – did I feel chastened and humbled? But also annoyed!

Because, let's be fair, when it comes to the bickering, we all know who started it, don't we?

And it wasn't your vicar!

Who was it who apparently said "I can't believe a word of what the vicar says about anything"?

Not a very nice thing to say, is it?

No wonder Mr Brown, sitting on the platform at the meeting with his arms folded and a gloomy expression on his face, said nothing!

As it is written in the Book of Proverbs, "Silence is Gordon"!

And let's not forget who it was who carefully arranged his talk about Africa months before, so that it would clash with the talk on Asia that I had organised that very morning, to take place at the same time.

So there we were, with the ridiculous situation of Mr Brown down at the Scout Hut with no one to listen to him – and me in the church, with a packed congregation applauding my deeply compassionate sermon!

And that's meant to be my fault? P-u-r-lease!!!

So, let's get this whole thing clear, shall we?

It's time to put all this talk about bickering behind us, and move on! Particularly gloomy Gordon!

Everyone is totally agreed about this. There is now 100 percent unity in the parish on the moving on from the bickering issue (apart from Gordon!).

So, I'm going to move on anyway, and Gordon can do what he likes!

I've got a job to do, and one, I would like to make it clear, which I never agreed to hand over to anyone else! Why would I?

That would be stupid, when everyone is begging me to stay on, wouldn't it?

So can I just say here, before I say anything else, that I would like to offer my sincere condolences to all those who lost loved ones in the various recent natural disasters, both at home and abroad.

I think we can all agree that these have very much put into perspective such trivial matters as people making their silly little points about the way I run the parish!

Yours

(more in anger than in sorrow!)

Tony

Parish Support Line

Has your faith in the vicar been shaken by recent terrible events?

Some people in the parish have been asking in recent weeks – if he is so "omnipotent", how can he let these awful things happen?

There's no easy answer to this. Some people say that the vicar gave Gordon "free will" to do whatever he wanted. So he can't be held to blame!

Others say it's not so simple. The vicar moves in a mysterious way and it is not for us to attempt to fathom his mysterious purposes!

If you are one of those whose faith has been put to the test, why not seek expert counselling by ringing Mr Milburn on the vicarage support line, where you can hear a special recorded explanation of how you have got it wrong!

(There is no need to leave contact details, because Mr Mandelson has passed on his address book, so Mr Milburn knows where you live!)

Parish Tsunami Appeal

An anonymous benefactor has very kindly and generously donated a whole binliner-full of old children's toys to our local charity shop. The value of these toys has been professionally valued at a staggering £8.50! Well done, Mrs Blair!

Village Panto

'Spinderella!'

Another cracking production by the St Albion Players, which had the audience falling about. We particularly loved the scene where the ugly sister (was that Mr Brown doing a fine grumpy turn?) told Prince Charming (the vicar on fine form!) that he didn't believe a thing he said. "Oh yes, you do," said Tony. "Oh no, I don't," said Gordon. And so it went on for hours – until long after the audience had left. Can't wait for next year's 'Blair Babes In The Woods'. A.M.

Helping the homeless

As you will all be aware, the vicar and his good lady have generously agreed to rent out their beatiful new house in Ratrun Square, as their contribution to helping the homeless. They have now, even more generously, agreed to reduce the rent they are asking to an even more affordable level - from £20,000 a week to a rock bottom £19,000.

If you would like the chance to snap up this luxurious home, with easy access to a number of delightful Lebanese restaurants, Iranian chemists and a branch of the Al Qaeda Bank, apply at once to Messrs. Feiner de Smith (Lovely Properties 'R' Us). A.M.

Salve!

A BIG ST ALBION'S WELCOME into the fold to Mr Jackson of whom none of you had heard until this week!

"I have been converted," he told everyone at his induction service. "All these years I have been walking in darkness and now I have seen the light."

Mr Jackson used to belong to the obscure Transylvanian cult led by Mr Howard, our local solicitor, who believe that they are "undead" and that one day they will be reincarnated and come back to life.

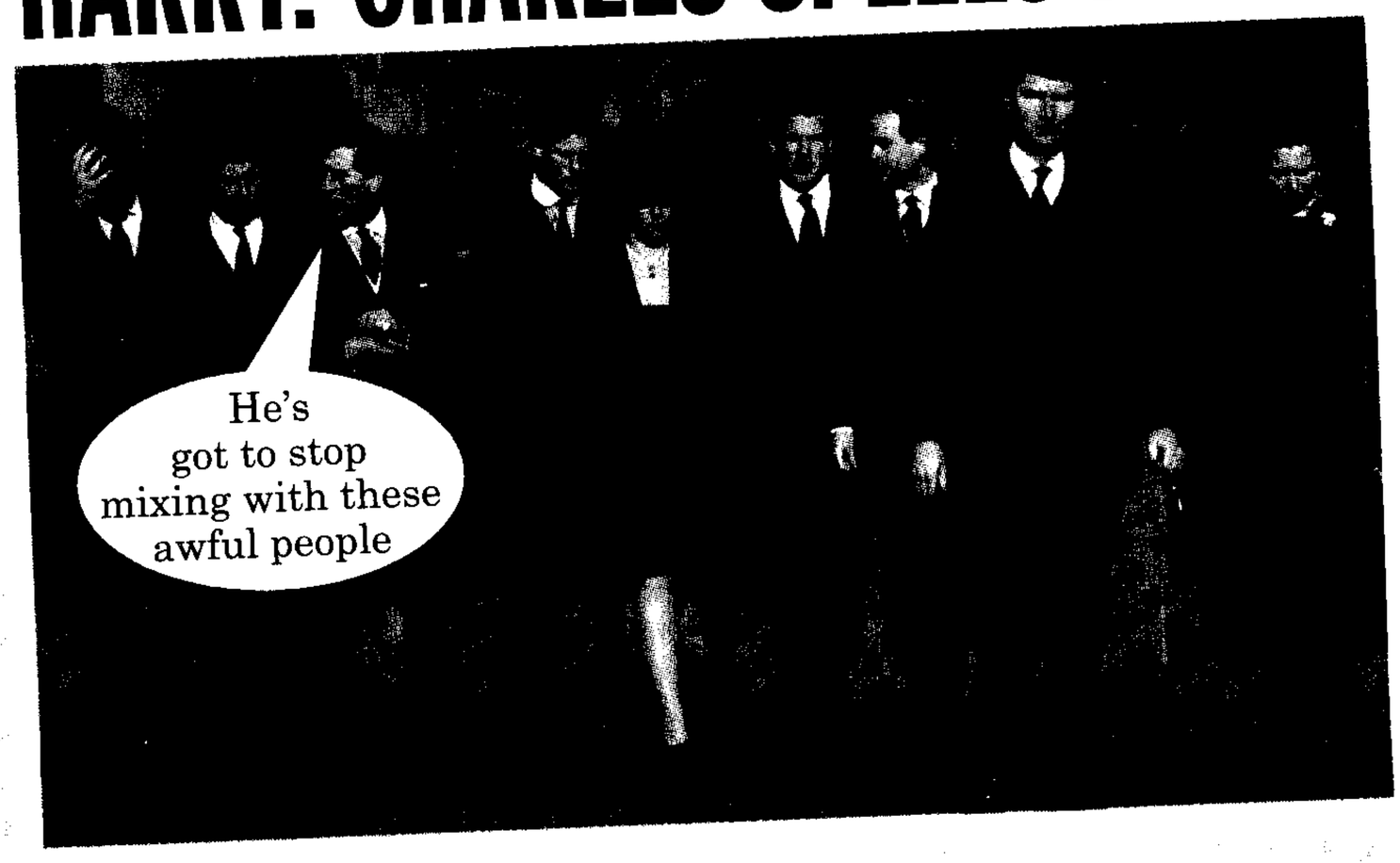
He now accepts that this is silly, and he realises that the Vicar represents the only path to salvation.

As the Good Book says, "There is more rejoicing in one sinner who repents than 99 boring members of the PCC who do what they are told"! T.B.

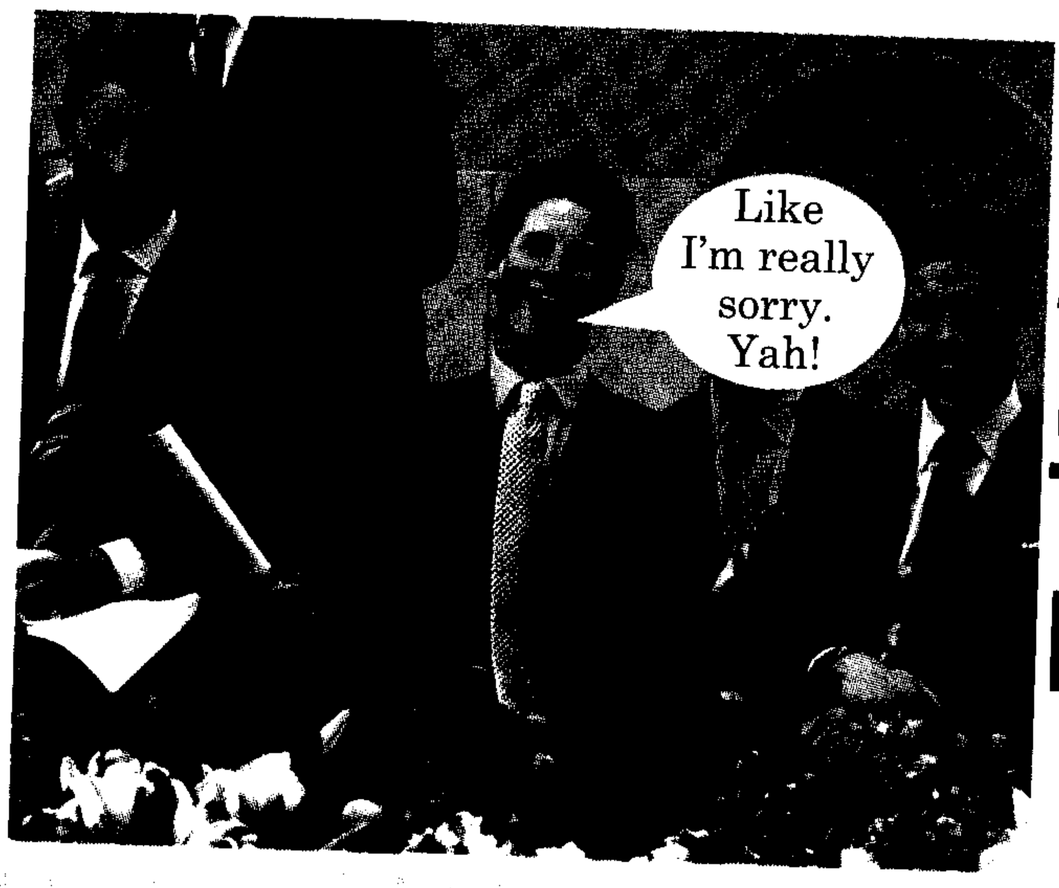
THE WEEK IN PICTURES

FANCY DRESS SHOCK

HARRY: CHARLES SPELLS IT OUT



AN APOLOGY FROM THE PRINCE



EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

MONARCHY'S DAY OF SHAME

by Our Entire Staff

BRITAIN's monarchy was today plunged into its worst-ever crisis, as fury mounted over the horrifying pictures that have stunned the world.

It is hard to recall a cataclysmic blunder of such proportions, which could well spell the end of the thousand-year rule of the House of Windsor.

Armageddon

Across the nation a sense of white-hot outrage swept through the entire population, as more and more voices joined the tide of protest.

Among the groups we contacted in the hope that they would be outraged were army veterans, holocaust victims and OAPs who had lived through the Blitz.

Their verdict was unanimous. "We can't see what the fuss is about," they said.

YOU DECIDE

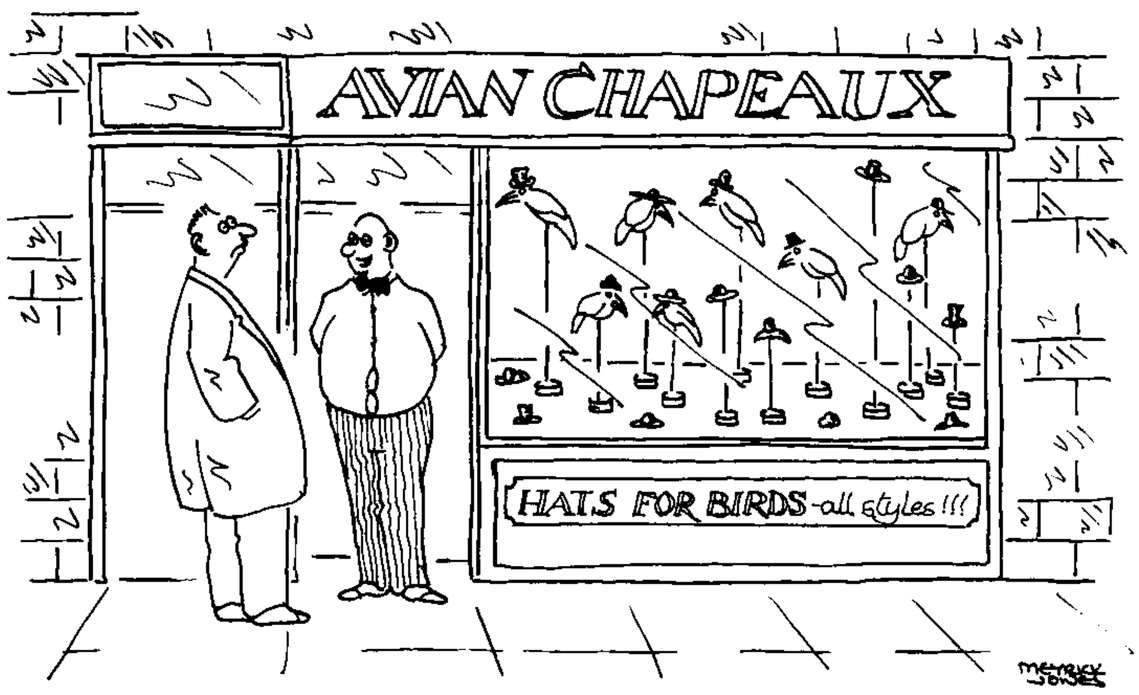
What should be done to the Nazi prince?

Should he:

A) be forced to make a public apology from the balcony of Buckingham Palace?

B) be strung up?

C) attend counselling sessions with Dr Germaine Greer?



"Of course, it is a niche market. I realise that I'm never going to make a fortune"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Strawberry Fields

So. Farewell
Then Strawberry
Fields –

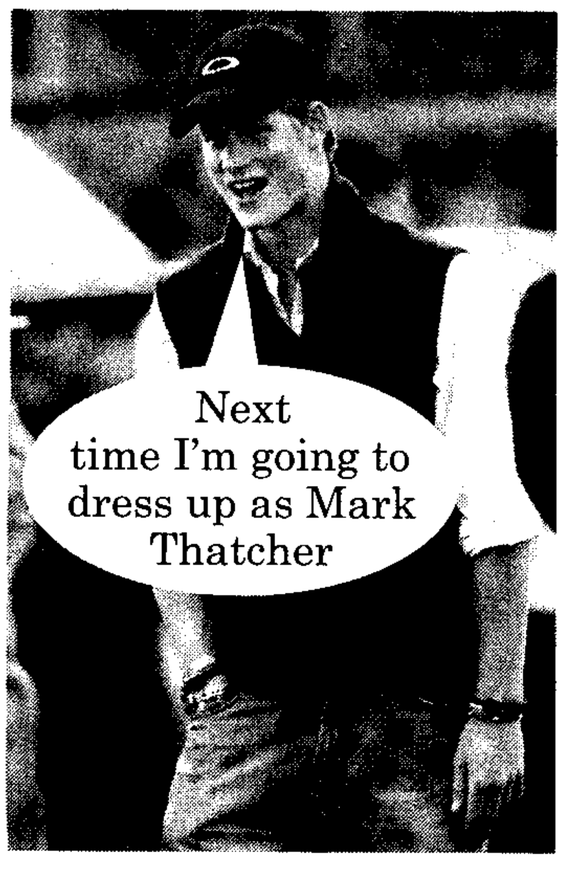
The Liverpool
Children's home
Made famous
By the Beatles'
Song.

"Strawberry Fields
Forever."

Except you
Weren't.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

PRINCE HARRY — NEW SHOCK



THICK BOY DOES SOMETHING THICK

A DIM young man did something stupid yesterday which he then regretted. *(Reuters)*

TIMETABLE OF DISASTER – THE TRAGIC EVENT THAT HORRIFIED THE WORLD

6.37pm

HARRY receives phone call from Rupert saying he's going to Bingo's bash as a Zulu, which is going to be "a bloody good laugh".

6.39pm

HARRY rings Tasha who says she's going as "a Chav" and it'll be "a hoot".

6.41pm

JIGGY rings to say that she is going as a "Penguin", which will be "bloody funny".

6.43pm

PRINCE WILLIAM announces that he is going as "a lion". No one thinks this is "a scream" at all.

6.45pm

HARRY rings 'Stupid Costumes 'R Us' to find that Pongo has taken the last Ku Klux Klan outfit. "Bastard!"

6.48pm

HARRY has brainstorming session.

7.48pm

BRAINSTORMING session fails to yield results.

7.50pm

HARRY goes to costume shop to see what's left. He chooses famous "Sound of Music outfit". Tells Stiffy, "This'll be legend".

8.43pm

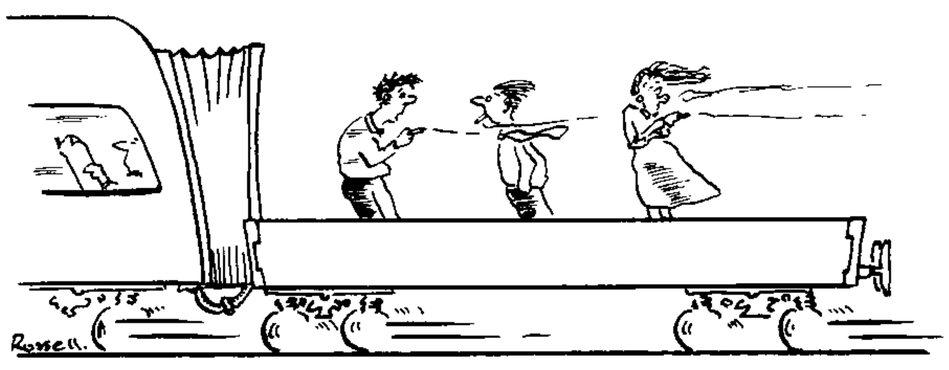
HARRY arrives at Bingo's dressed as Nazi. Chorus of "Boffo fancy dress, Hazza, you da man!"

8.53pm

BARFHEAD's mate, Bogbrush, takes picture of Harry on mobile phone and sends to *Sun* newspaper.

8.59pm

QUEEN abdicates, as monarchy ends.



"I'm not crazy about these new smoking carriages"

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2005

HOUSE PRICES TUMBLE AFTER HARRY OUTRAGE

By Our Harry Outrage Staff
Hans Up

PRINCE Harry's catastrophic fancy dress blunder has not only cost Britain the Olympics and stalled the Middle East peace process, it has also triggered a dramatic fall in house prices across Britain.

No, It Hasn't

From Poole to Preston, from Billericay to Bognor Regis, from Darlington to the Daily Mail, the story was the same: a house-price collapse of tsunami proportions has swept Britain.

Said one typical couple, Paul and Debby Madeupname, "Not only has Harry ruined the outcome of the Iraqi elections and hindered the eradication of world poverty, he has made our three-bedroomed bungalow

virtually worthless.

"Last week it was worth £325,000. Now our estate agent cannot give it away. Thank you, Prince Harry, for nothing."

INSIDE

Is turncoat Robert Jackson MP the biggest traitor since Judas? **94**

MAN THINKS BLAIR IS 'GOOD PRIME MINISTER' SHOCK

by Our Political Staff **Phil Myglass**

THE WORLD of politics was rocked to its foundations when a Wantage man, Robert Jackson MP, said that he "greatly admired Tony Blair".

Observers are convinced that Mr Jackson spoke voluntarily and without any form of torture being applied. One theory is that he is mad *(cont. p. 94)*

PARENTS FIGHT TO GET INTO 'SINK SCHOOLS'

by Our Education Staff **Lunchtime O'Level**

IN RESPONSE to the government's edict to top universities insisting that they take a large proportion of children from "low achieving schools", middle-class parents are now competing for places in so-called "bog-standard comprehensives".

Typical parents Mr and Mrs Fotherington Maltby-Smythe originally had their son, Crispin, entered for Eton.

"We now realise," they said, "that he has no chance of university entrance from Eton, so we have decided to make the big sacrifice and have moved into a caravan on a travellers' site in the catchment area of the James Callaghan Comprehensive (1,758th in the league tables).

"Only this way," they continued, "can we guarantee him a really bad education and ensure that he achieves sufficiently low grades to get into a decent university."

Who Are They – The 'Opus Toni'?

by Our Religious Affairs Correspondent **Cristina O'Donut**

EDUCATION Minister Ruth Kelly is only one of an ultra orthodox group of adherents to the cult of Blairism that is trying to take over Britain.

Ruthless

Opus Toni (translated as *"Everything Tony does is great"*) was founded in 1997 by the charismatic preacher Antonio Escoblair (now canonised as St Toni of Baghdad).

Disciples believe in a fanatical devotion to the leader and vow absolute obedience to whatever decision is made by the small coterie of ruthless fundamentalists who surround him.

Little Leo-nardo

The group came to light recently when it was featured in the best-selling book 'The Gordon Code' by Dan Brown, which claims that Tony Blair is a direct descendent of Jesus.

WHAT NEXT FOR MARK THATCHER?

AS Mark Thatcher begins to rebuild his shattered reputation, there is speculation about what career options are open to him. But what would you like him to be?

- **Dodgy businessman**
- **Door-to-door salesman**
- **Tory MP**
- **Small-time crook**
- **Traffic warden**
- **Timeshare consultant**
- **Member of Royal Family**

● **Ring 0898 975234 and you could win a romantic week in Equatorial Guinea with the world's oldest mother, Adriana Ilescu, 66!**

"Don't do it, son! We haven't got enough prison places..."

BRITON RELEASED FROM PRISON 'HELL ON EARTH'

by Our Political Staff **Juan Tanamo**

A BRITISH prisoner last night was allowed to walk free from what has been called "the most degrading penal institution in the western world".

Her release came after five days and nights of imprisonment, living with a gang of similarly brutalised inmates, totally cut off from any contact with the outside world.

Big Sister

Looking gaunt, strained and wild-eyed, the 65-year-old Germaine Greer told waiting newsmen, "It was worse than living under a Fascist tyranny. We were humiliated, deprived of sleep and our every move was monitored round-the-clock by TV cameras under blinding arc-lights".

Dr Greer, 76, an innocent Cambridge academic who breeds geese up the M11, was imprisoned after being suspected of wanting to earn large sums of money and to be on television.

Once locked away from the world, she was forced to dress up in mediaeval clothing and ordered to participate along with her fellow prisoners in a series of sadistic rituals organised by the camp authorities.

Germaine Warfare

After her gruelling ordeal, Dr Greer said, "I have been deeply traumatised by this experience. I had no idea that such things could go on in the so-called civilised world".

Dr Greer is said to be consulting her lawyers over the question of compensation for her horrendous experiences in captivity.

She is also receiving counselling to help her come to terms with the fact that she has made an idiot of herself.

Dr Greer is 106.

That All-Purpose Female Columnist's Attack On GERMAINE GREER

GERMAINE GREER used to be my idol. When I was a young girl, *The Female Eunuch* was my personal bible and Germaine was the feminist icon who opened my eyes and showed the whole world how a real woman could be intelligent, attractive, feisty and funny all at once – like me.

Germaine was a role model for us sisters who learned the importance of solidarity and *(Get on with attacking her or you're fired. Ed.)*

But now after her early departure from the Big Brother house, I reluctantly have to say that Germaine is a fat, old, wrinkled, washed-up, desperate, snobbish, arrogant, hypocritical, stupid, *(This is much better. Ed.)* ugly, foolish, fat, old, fat, fat, old, fat, old, fat, fat, fat, fat *(cont. p. 94)*

© *All newspapers.*

DULL PLANET FOUND

'Nothing There' Say Jubilant Scientists

by Our Science Correspondent

PICTURES of what is perhaps the most boring planet in the solar system were unveiled yesterday by excited European space scientists.

The planet 'Yorn', one of the moons of 'Zirg', was revealed to be of no interest whatsoever.

The space probe has travelled billions of miles through space on a journey lasting several years in order to record just how boring the planet is.

Said one scientist, "It's amazing. There is absolutely nothing there. Look! Nothing at all. This is the most exciting discovery we have ever made."

IS THIS a giant canyon with a lake containing huge banana-eating fish who can communicate telepathically?

No.

Inside ● More pix of the galaxy's dullest planet **2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 94**

Big Brother Day 94

WILL SULKING GORDY BE THE NEXT TO GO?

by Our Political Correspondent **Christopher Sylvester-Stallone**

HUDDLED in a corner in a permanent sulk, Gordy now refuses to talk to any of his fellow Cabinet inmates.

Over the weekend, viewers were shocked by his displays of petulance and bad temper.

"He's like a big baby," said fellow contestant Alan. "We're all mucking in together, doing all the set tasks like thinking up new slogans and making posters – and Gordy just sits there in a bate, insulting everyone and insisting on being supplied with a job as Prime Minister."

A furious Gordy, enraged at being denied what he said he had been promised, last night lashed out at his critics by claiming "Big Tony has broken his contract and I'm not going to play any more".

But the public have not warmed to the antics of the morose Scotsman, with his funny voice and strange eyebrows.

Bookmakers were last night giving odds of 2-1 on Gordon Brown being expelled from the Cabinet after the next big vote.

TEEN GIRLS' WEIGHT OBSESSION RESULT OF MEDIA MANIPULATION SHOCK

A REPORT published this week has claimed that teenage girls' fixation with body image is linked to their exposure to glossy magazines, TV and pop videos.

On Other Pages

- **Pope Reveals Soft Spot For Catholic Religion**
- **Fish Takes A Dip**

A Daily Mail Campaign

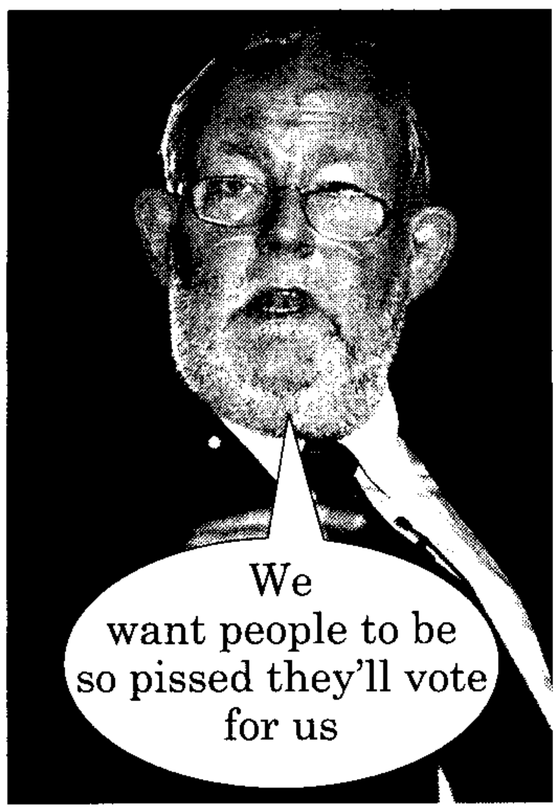
WHY 24-HOUR THINKING WILL BE A DISASTER

IN THIS country we cannot afford to let people indulge in round-the-clock thinking. The prospect of large numbers of people walking around the streets thinking all night long is an extremely depressing one.

To be honest, we at the *Mail* would rather that thinking time was strictly limited, otherwise we could face the nightmare scenario where people have been thinking so much that they realise that they shouldn't buy the *Daily Mail* any more. And then what will happen? Yes, house prices will begin to plummet and *(cont. p. 94)*

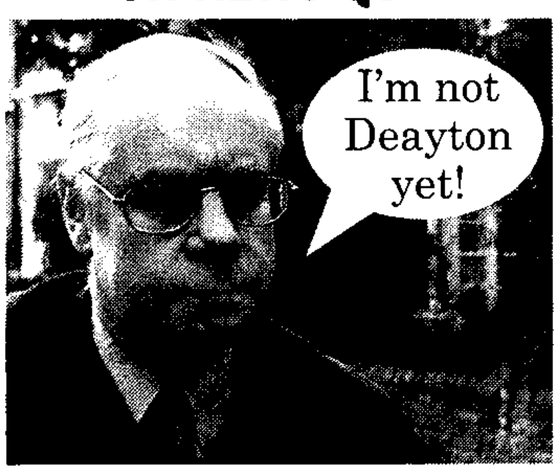
"Blast! That woman's been going to my cosmetic surgeon"

24-HOUR DRINKING



"I only said I don't like going to church"

HOGGART TO CONTINUE ON NEWS QUIZ



Tonight's TV

Strictly Come Quietly

BBC1 9.00pm

NEW show in which Esther Rantzen teams up with a professional policeman (Inspector 'Knacker of the Met' Knacker) in order to make a song and dance about her minor traffic offence. Will the judges rate Esther's performance – or will they fine her £60 for driving onto a pedestrian crossing? Yes. And when she is finally found guilty will she win over the public by writing endless silly pieces in all the newspapers? No.

Desperate Commissioning Editors

C4 10.00pm

NEW series focusing on the lives of a group of Channel Four commissioning editors who are desperate to boost their ratings by broadcasting another American TV show filled with glossy bonking.

Letters to the Editor

The Jerry Springer Controversy

Dear Sir,

There comes a point beyond which no decent television viewer can be pushed. And that moment came for me when I turned on BBC2 expecting to see 'Jerry Springer The Opera', a blasphemous and outrageous farago of filth and degradation, only to find that I had tuned in at the wrong time and indeed the wrong channel, thus ending up instead watching an entirely innocuous German satellite pornography show.

I therefore had no option but to set fire to my television set before issuing a death threat to myself. May I urge other viewers to do the same?

Yours (not as disgusted as I had hoped),

SIR HERBERT GUSSET,
The Old Rectory,
Yoghurt St Ivel,
Dorset.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE
The IRA And Criminals

Criminals

Wear Ski Masks

Carry Guns

Terrorise Innocent Members Of Public

Rob Banks

Sometimes Get Caught

IRA

Wear Ski Masks

Carry Guns

Terrorise Innocent Members Of Public

Rob Banks

Er...

MIDLANDS FAITH SCHOOL TOPS LEAGUE TABLES

by Our Education Staff **Ruth Jelly**

A TOP Midlands public school has been rewarded for its decision to become a Muslim faith school by topping this year's secondary school league tables.

Last year, St Cake's was 907th on the national list, coming bottom in every category.

Since changing its name to Al Qaek's, and restricting entry only to the daughters of very rich Asian businessmen, the school has seen its academic record soar.

Said the headmaster, Mr Yussef Islam (formerly Mr R.J. Kipling BA, Leicester), "We are delighted with this dramatic turnabout in our school's fortunes. As the school motto has it, *'All praise to the prophet, and death to the infidel'*".

The motto was previously *'Quis paget entrat'* ('Who pays gets in').

SPOT THE BALLS

LET'S PARLER ESPANOL
con David Beckham

Now you too can learn to speak fluent Spanish in only 10 seconds, with the aid of someone in the next room telling you what to say through your earpiece.

Phrase 1

¿Donde están las prostitutas, señor?

(Translation: I am very happy to be playing for Madrid even though I have been dropped from the team.)

That's enough Spanish. Ed.

SHOCK
CELEBRITY COUPLE TO SPLIT

THERE WAS widespread shock and disbelief this week, when it was announced that an extremely famous and attractive married couple were going to separate.

Front pages devoted to the Tsunami earthquake were cleared to make way for this incredible story, as few reporters could deny that the famous couple splitting up was an equally world-shattering once-in-a-lifetime event.

NOT FRIENDS

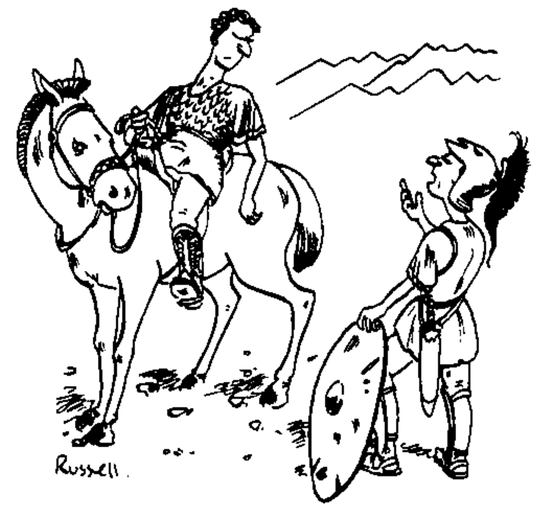
"We are completely stunned." said Hollywood commentators, "We never expected an extremely famous and attractive Hollywood couple to get bored with each other and end their marriage in this way, it's completely without precedent."

"Let's hope something like this never happens."

MOBILE PHONES HEALTH SCARE

PARENTS are being warned that there are "serious health implications" should they decide to buy their children mobile phones.

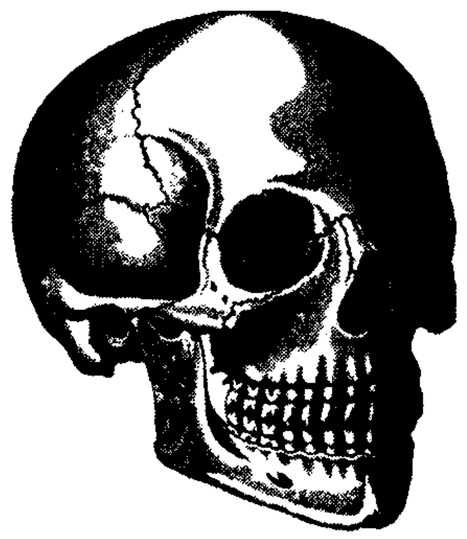
"There are countless heart attacks happening all over the country when these parents receive the first monthly bill." said an expert *(cont. p. 94)*



"You call it conquering the world, Alexander; I call it mission-creep"

HOW ELVIS WOULD LOOK NOW

ON THE 70th anniversary of Elvis Presley's birthday, computer boffins using the very latest state-of-the-art technology have managed to put together a picture of what he would look like today.



BORIS JOHNSON

Don't believe a word of this!

CRIPES! So the boffins are telling us that mobiles are dangerous! Especially for tiny tots, whose brains they say can be turned to jelly and custard!

What rot! I use a mobile all the time, especially when I'm on my bike, ringing up my mistress and asking her what time I should come round!

And I can tell you this – there's nothing wrong with my brain! It's us grod is any bong's selses!

© Beano Boris, the *Dally Telegraph*

Join the Great Mobile Debate! Ring or text us on your mobile and c f ur branes fried!

the PREMIERSH*TS

WELL IT'S A FRIENDLY MATCH WITH ALL THE PROCEEDS GOING TO THE VICTIMS OF THE TSUNAMI
I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT...
ALL THE 'NAMES' WILL BE THERE...
WANKER!
TOSSER!
SHIT HEAD!
TWAT!

DIARY

LORD KINNOCK OF BEDWELTY

Who'd have believed it, eh? Lord Kinnock of Bedwelty! But I'm still the same old Neil Kinnock underneath. Down to earth. Oh, very much so. In fact, more so, if that were possible, which I believe it to be. Only last night, we popped out for a curry, and a very tasty and delicious and furthermore nutritious curry it was too.

I may have been raised to the House of Lords, of that there is no point in denying, but I remain deeply and indissolubly committed to a complete and, as it were, wholesale democratic reform of the second chamber. I have no need, requirement or want for what one might call the grandeur, indeed, not to put too fine a point on it, magnificence of a title. Nevertheless, and having said that, you must admit "Lord Kinnock of Bedwelty" has a very pretty ring to it!

"Lord Kinnock of Bedwelty." "Lord Kinnock of Bedwelty." "Lord Kinnock of Bedwelty." No matter how many times I say it, or repeat it, I still find it hard to believe that, yes, that's really me, the young lad from the valleys, more interested in the ladies, bless 'em, than in the finer details of economic and social reform – but now raised, whether he likes it or not, to the higher reaches of the aristocracy!

Fantabulous!

But it's not something I choose to go on about, my new title, not a bit of it. "Lord Kinnock of Bedwelty." Sounds magnificent, though, you must agree, almost as if it were the first line or chorus of some glorious hymn from the Welsh valley songbook, sung by those marvellous Welsh miners of my youth, tears glistening in the eyes of their coal-blackened faces, like so many sacred torches in the dark. And, to be quite frank and perfectly candid, it was those old Welsh miners of whom I was thinking or contemplating when I agreed to accept my elevation to the peerage. "That's our Neil!" I could hear them say, "The boyo's done himself proud! And brought honour and recognition to the valleys, honour and recognition in which we can all share, though obviously we would not ourselves be permitted into the Chamber of the House of Lords, fair enough!"

Out for a spot of shopping the other day – as a matter of interest, I still insist on doing all my own shopping from a variety of shops or stores – I got talking to a friendly shopkeeper, lovely man, very, very warm. It turned out he'd seen me on the telly the night before, being subjected to a respectful and deeply affectionate ribbing by my fellow panellists! "What did you think of it?" I asked him. "Bit of a laugh, eh?"

"Made you look a right prat!" he said as he handed me my change. I had a good laugh at this and thanked the fellow very kindly, leaving his store with a special sort of glow. After all these years, I'm still recognised with, if I may say so, the very deepest respect by ordinary folk, and recognised, furthermoreso, as "one of us" – a guy they're still prepared to turn on their tv's for, sure in the knowledge that he can see the funny side of life – and crack a joke, jest or humorous remark with the best of 'em! Superb!

I've had some truly interesting jobs in my time, but being Transport Commissioner for the European Commission was certainly one of the most constructive, effective and involving, setting a framework of priorities within which to strengthen, sustain and re-engage the modern resources necessary for the smooth-running of a thorough up-to-date and ongoing priority framework.

At the layman's level, and to put this into syllables of just a few words, I was tasked with tackling and getting to grips with far-reaching problems such as how we – that is, not only you and I, but also he, she, we, it (bearing in mind pets and other animals) you plural and they – get from A to B.

But I was never satisfied with limiting my remit to journeys from A to B.

Far from it. In my years with the Commission, I sought to engage in a fundamental overhaul of existing reforms to extend the parameters of our framework of priorities to incorporate journeys not only from A to B but also from A to C not to mention the all-important A to D, and, of course, back again, that is, from B to A and from C to A, and from D to A. And – to extend the analogy – what if someone, be they man or woman or, of course, child, which, for these purposes, and these purposes alone, is a definition which incorporates the concept of teenager, wants or is minded to go from D to A, say, but wants to stop off on the way, for whatever reason, and reasons there may well be many, to take a look, or glance, at B, or even, for sake of argument, stay for that little bit longer at C, which, from all accounts, is an attractive place, full of interesting and imaginative things to do and or see on a visit or visits and otherwise participate in, on, about or towards?

Well, I put the old thinking cap on and came to the conclusion, after several years, that there are no quick and easy answers. There never are, nor will there ever be. But I both recall and look back on my time wearing my Transport cap with a great deal of pride, and I look forward to continuing my travels in and around the EC in the years ahead, regardless of race, colour or creed.

I now take over the Chair of the British Council, ready to meet the challenges ahead, challenges not only to do with the whole nature of being the Council in question, but also to do with the whole nature of what it is to be British in the 21st century, and, before that, the 20th century. You know, I'll never forget the wise words of an old Welsh miner, a marvellous old boy who took me to one side when I was still in shorts and said, "Neil" he said, he said, "Neil – no matter how high you rise, there is something you must always remember."

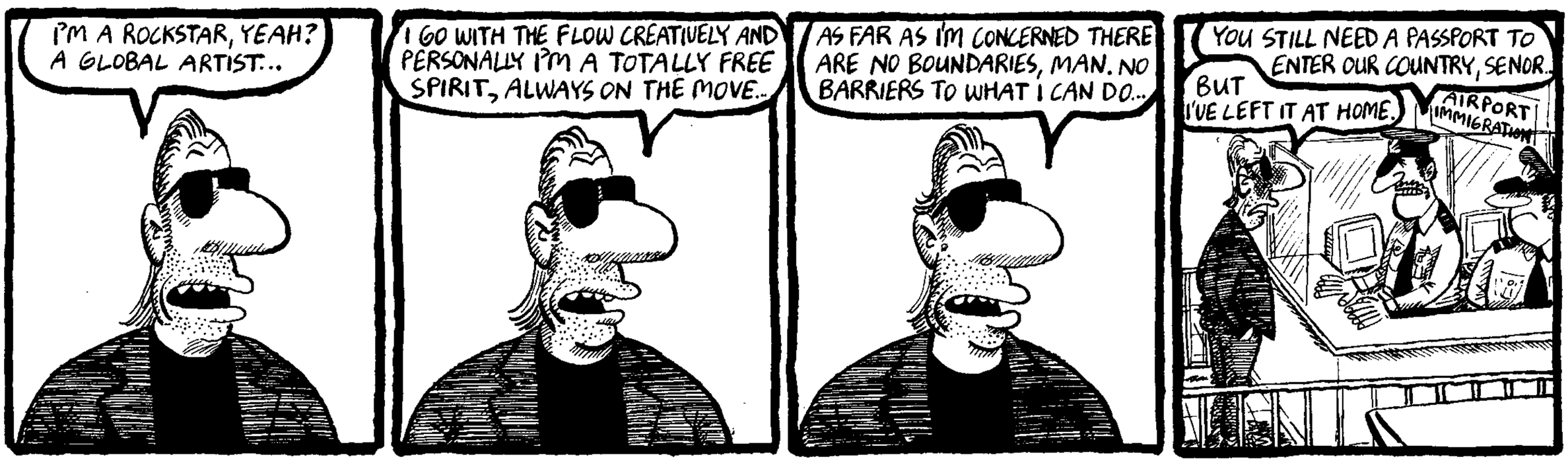
Well, I listened long and hard to that marvellous old boy, as Welsh as the day is long, a miner to the tips of his toes, and I vowed then and there and not only then but also, I should add, there – to heed his hard-won words of wisdom.

No, I don't recall what they were, and I'm not claiming that I do. But now that I am a – for want of a better word – distinguished member of the House of Lords, I can help put them into practice, whatever they were. But for the moment, you know what? I could murder a curry.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


I'M A ROCKSTAR, YEAH? A GLOBAL ARTIST...
I GO WITH THE FLOW CREATIVELY AND PERSONALLY I'M A TOTALLY FREE SPIRIT, ALWAYS ON THE MOVE..
AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED THERE ARE NO BOUNDARIES, MAN. NO BARRIERS TO WHAT I CAN DO...
YOU STILL NEED A PASSPORT TO ENTER OUR COUNTRY, SENOR..
BUT I'VE LEFT IT AT HOME.
AIRPORT IMMIGRATION

Literary Review

Happy new you?

JANUARY has long been a problem in publishing. As most books are sold in the run-up to Christmas, there's little point releasing anything immediately afterwards. So the industry, like the nation, is faced with a collective hangover just at the time everyone could do with some money and some cheering-up.

In recent years, however, publishers have found a new wheeze to see them through the barren months. As post-Christmas readers stare disconsolate into 12 months of self-loathing, uncomfortable questions begin to bubble under the collective psyche. Are you in control of your life? Do you ever wonder where the time goes? Are you doing the things YOU want to do?

Feeding on this wellspring of depression and discontent, publishing has discovered a sparkling new revenue stream: for every forlorn new year's resolution there shall be a 200-page panacea.

The problem for January's glut of self-reinvention books is that the same people buy them year in, year out. This implies two things: that secretly they know they don't work (else why would they be back buying another one?); and that if they are back buying another one it had better be nothing like the last one – because that didn't work. The challenge for publishers and quack theorists, then, is to dress the same old cobblers in new clothing.

The Mind Gym: Wake Your Mind Up, is a prime example. Without a listed author it promises to "discover how we can use our minds more effectively so that we can get more out of life and give more to others". The usual Dale Carnegie hogwash, in other words, but re-written in the parlance of the gym, so your brain takes on the status of your pectorals and the current obsession with exercise is blithely transferred to the realm of self-help.

The platitudes, however, remain; and as with horoscopes, as long as they are broad enough, they leave little room for dissent. *The Mind Gym*, for example, offers a "workout programme" called Get What You Want, which is "For people who know what they want but don't know how to get it, especially when new obstacles keep getting in the way".

Roughly translated, that means all of us. The other three programmes are "Be Liked, Be Respected and Ride the Storm," which are also fairly universal aims. It will come as no surprise to learn that the Mind Gym began life in the corporate world, a sop for bored execs to make themselves feel fulfilled. Workshops like these have been foisted upon hapless staff by HR departments from Barclays to the BBC, which should be all you need to know to steer clear.

The Life Audit by Caroline Righton takes the same imponderables as *The Mind Gym* but chooses to counter them through the medium of accountancy, rather than aerobics. The idea is to "Take Control of Your Life. Right Now" and it begins with the standard author epiphany in which she explains how her life changed ("Sitting in bed very early one January morning, hugging a cup of coffee, was the moment I realised that I'd run out of excuses as to why I wasn't living the life I wanted.") Righton's solution was to write a self-help book, presumably because with the pots of cash made from hapless dupes, she could then live the life she wanted.

The Life Audit addresses human happiness and frailty with an interminable series of spreadsheets, equations and pie-charts. The idea is to do a "Stocktake on Me", on the principal that life is time, so if you can work out where you're wasting time, you'll have a better life. To which the obvious rejoinder is that if you were to stop wasting your time doing Family Relationship Breakevens and Citizenship Stocktakes, you would indeed have a better life.

With your life audited and your mind newly buffed, that only leaves the post-Christmas gut to be flattened, and the new year favourite on this front is turning out to be *French Women Don't Get Fat* by Mireille Guiliano. This does at least jettison the pretence that any scientific grounding is underpinning its author's sweeping generalisations, which is gratifying in the face of such a self-evidently ludicrous title.

The sell for *FWDGF* is that it is no radical programme, no quick fix, the very antithesis of all the usual January fare. This may well be true, but once it becomes apparent that Guiliano's "plan", a vague reworking of the Montignac diet, is based on nothing more than her observances as a chi-chi *boulevardier* strolling Montparnasse with a croissant and a glass of champagne, it's hard to give it much credence. Especially as she notes with admirable *hauteur* that: "I am no physician, physiologist, psychologist, nutritionist or any manner of 'ist'." Except perhaps an opportunist.

Guiliano is CEO of Veuve Clicquot in New York, and having climbed so high she has no need for the irksome exigencies of scientific fact. She herself is "the living proof" that her methods work, and the whole book is therefore structured around her life story, growing up in France where she didn't get fat, and then moving to New York, where she did. Realistically, then, this book should be called *Mireille Guiliano Doesn't Get Fat and Her Life is Better Than Yours In Every Way*. It is feasible that in the presence of Guiliano some readers will lose weight immediately through an inability to hold down food whilst contemplating the millionaire authoress whom they have just gifted a further £12. You too can be like the marvellous Mireille is the message – the question is, as with all the authors and readers of these New You books, do you really want to?

Books & Bookmen

■ THE word on festive trading is that a late surge rescued booksellers from an unmerry Christmas.

All except for Ottakar's, that is, which has issued a warning that its full-year profits will be lower than expected due to dismal Christmas trading. The extent of the problem was realised early on, but MD James Heneage told staff that "we are pinning our hopes on a frenetic final spending spree by our customers".

Later in the memo, however, he made it clear that hopes were also pinned on the willingness of booksellers to stay late on Christmas Eve, with no indication that they were to be paid for the overtime. "Take any opportunity to extend trading hours at the start or the end of the day," he exhorted, in best Dig for Victory style. "If the shop is full at 5.30, for heaven's sake don't close but trade on… please be sensible about Christmas Eve. I know you all want to get home but only shut the doors when the last (sober and spending) customer has left. We really do need every sale we can get."

Unfortunately for the desperate Ebenezer Heneage and his shareholders, £5.30 an hour doesn't buy much loyalty these days, and so most "sensible" Ottakar's booksellers chose to go home at the normal time and stuff the turkey, not to mention the chances of a "frenetic spree" justifying Heneage's misplaced financial optimism.

■ FOLLOWING the monstrous success of Dave Pelzer's various books for Orion about his childhood and the alleged abuse he suffered at the hands of his mother, other publishers have been looking frantically for their own Pelzer-alikes.

Time Warner, the publisher formerly known as Little Brown Jug, has found its own seam of Pelzer gold. It has just published *A Brother's Journey: Surviving a Childhood of Abuse* by Richard Pelzer, Dave's brother who aided the evil mother before copping for most of it himself once Dave flew the nest. The remaining major publishers are now thought to be asking if there are enough Pelzer siblings to go around.

■ THANK you for giving Granta as a gift this year. Your order has been processed, and the first be sent out safely before the Royal Mail's recommended last posting dates for Christmas, so that in the run-up to Christmas.

Please find enclosed your free copy of The Granta Diary 2005. I hope you find it useful, and that your gift much good reading in the year to come.

– Letter to subscribers from Granta, *magazine for the literary connoisseur and acclaimed for some of the best journalism in the English language.*

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

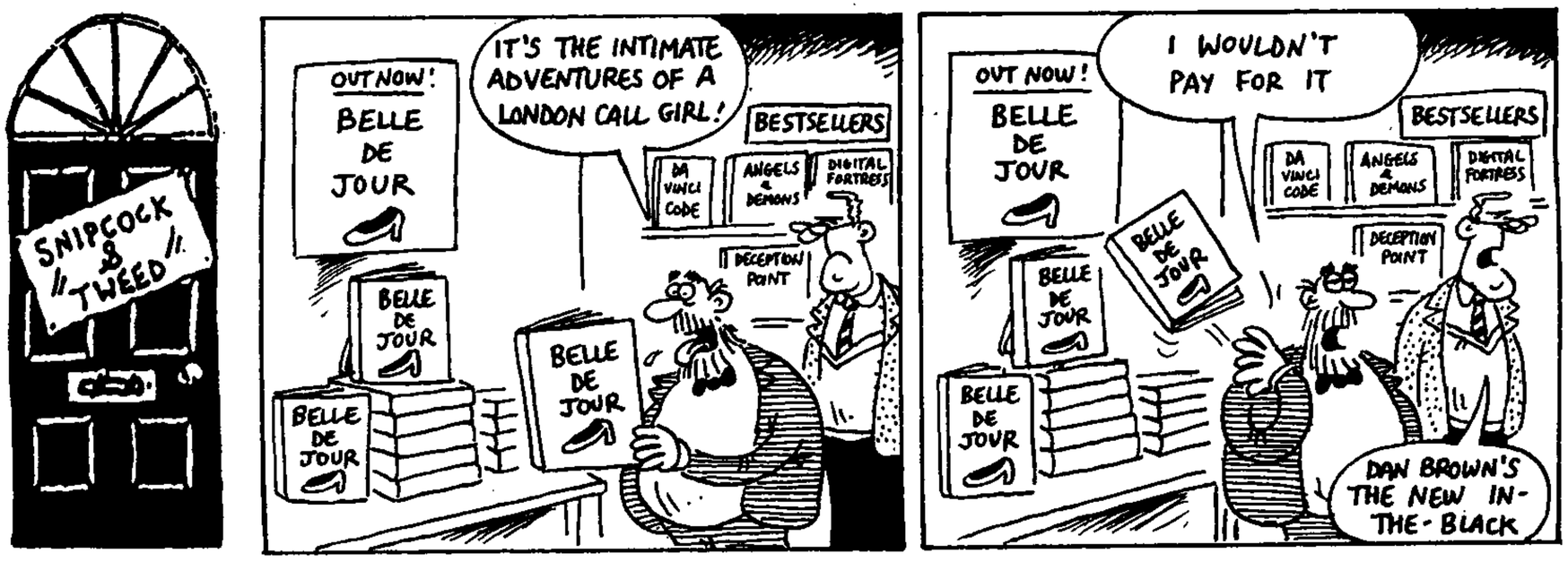
■ AS IF things weren't bad enough at the Belfast education and libraries board – with a £5m overspend and the threat of closure for seven branch libraries – two former managers of the service's money have issued writs for slander against their bosses.

Suspended deputy chief finance officer Michael Dowling and former financial accountant Michael Kane (who left in August) have started legal action against chief executive David Cargo and members of the board over comments which were made about their handling of the budget crisis at a huge public meeting.

One major point of difference between the finance officers and the board is that they say that the board was warned of the likely overspend in December 2003, while the board claims it wasn't told about the problems until summer 2004.

Mr Cargo was himself suspended by the board in October after the extent of the overspending became clear. He was reinstated in December, the day before he was due to challenge the suspension in the high court

A decision on the future of the seven libraries earmarked for closure is to be made later this month.



Bio-degradable

Body Parts: Essays on Life-writing

Hermione Lee

(Chatto & Windus, £20)

OF ALL the sub-divisions of literature chewed up by the academy's ravening maw in the past half-century or so, biography and autobiography came last of all to the feast.

Drama, poetry, the novel – all these were assumed by the persons who went about founding university English departments to possess, if in varying degrees, some kind of respectability. Biography – imprecise, opinionated, ever-veering towards the salacious – looked like a ransacked knicker drawer by comparison. Happily, this attitude could not be indefinitely sustained. As the vogue for creative writing courses rampaged its way through the university system, so "life-writing" – the new official description of the memoir or the life and times – has followed in its wake.

Older readers will remember Hermione Lee as the presenter of one of the last old-style (ie "serious") TV books programmes back in the early 80s. Sadly the media career failed to take off, and bluestocking Ms L returned to her lectureship at the University of York to write (among much else) a compendious life of Virginia Woolf and re-emerge, some years ago, as Goldsmith's Professor at Oxford.

These august credentials mean the pieces brought together in *Body Parts* fairly hum with high academic seriousness, and yet the general air turns out to be horribly *belles-lettrist*. What we have here, in fact, is a collection of old book reviews and lectures, some of them dating back more than 20 years, to which Ms L has tried to impart some faint thought of cohesion by changing the "doesn'ts" to "didn'ts", substituting the words "life-writing" for biography at every opportunity, and periodically inserting somewhat clumsy references to "the women I've been writing about in this book".

What follows is a stark reminder of the difficulty biography still has – despite the eminence of its practitioners – in getting itself taken seriously. So, as a gossipy piece about writer's physical remains (Yeats's bones, Shelley's heart and so on) gives way to a dissection of what cinema did to Virginia Woolf, the vigilant reader notes on the one hand a state-of-the-art critical vocabulary, in which issues are never argued over but "contested" and anyone without a proper 21st century sex-life is marked down as "repressed", and on the other a prose-style which might be described as fiftysomething going on 16. The late-period Edmund Gosse, you might be interested to know, was "a self-satisfied fat cat" and also "revoltingly smug".

None of this is to denigrate the sharpness of the professorial intelligence on display. The piece about Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours* and the film version that followed is a knowing excursus on what celluloid can do to felt life. Similarly, the essay on Penelope Fitzgerald shows in the space of a couple of pages the simultaneous charm and toughness of Fitzgerald's writing. As for what Ms L has to say about the craft from which she earns a decent part of her living, though, here are a few specimen conclusions.

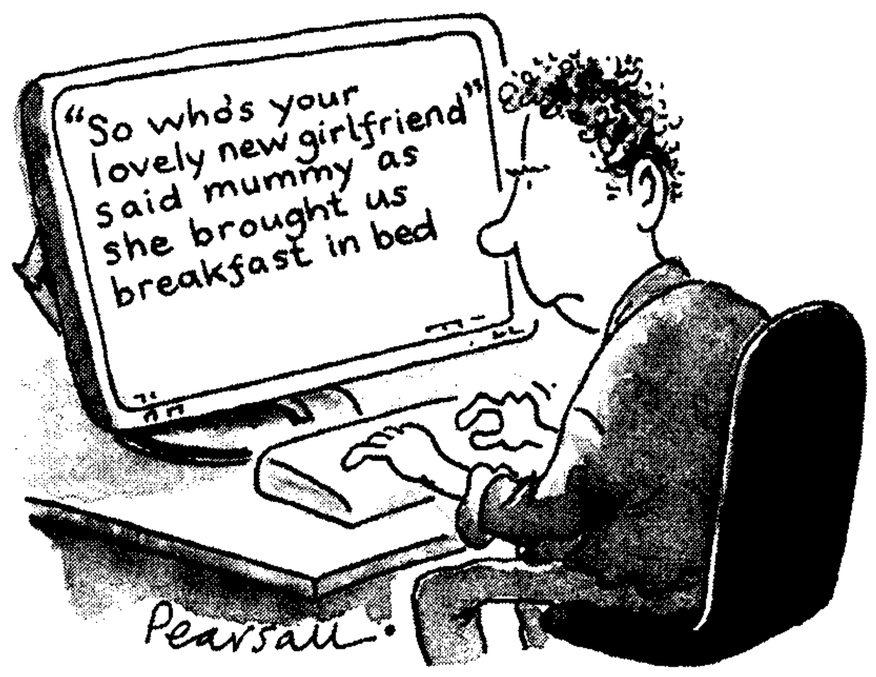
On the link between T.S. Eliot's life and work: "I don't want to collapse his writing entirely into autobiography. I want to recognise the life in the work, *and* to see how it's transformed." On Virginia Woolf's death: "I could describe, as far as I knew it, how she ended it all, but I couldn't entirely – and nor can anyone – say why." I think we get the idea.

Best of all is the paragraph in which she poses a few inquiries about how the biographer should deal with the subject's passing – stick to the facts? Pour emotion on to the page? – before brightly concluding: "The answers to these questions will depend very much on whether, and in what cultural context, *The Life* is being written." Many other trade secrets of this kind may be found in these valuable pages.

No sour grapes of course. If "life-writing" is going to be taught in universities, then who better than Professor Lee here to teach it? Already, though, as the life-writing MAs stream out of their colleges into an already crowded jobs market, the seam is becoming exhausted. This week alone sees the publication of two lives of the Romantic era impresario Leigh Hunt. Arguably one would be pushing it.

There are too many biographers and not enough subjects. All that is left for the aspiring life-writer is the re-evaluation of titans who have already been done to death, or grubbing around in the vaults for minor figures who might just be relevant to the complex agendas of the 21st century. As for literature, to judge from the thousands of writing students busily at work and the academic salariat bidden to sustain them, that eternal bower where airy fancy lurked is fast becoming a branch of the civil service.

First Drafts



Jeanette Winterson

Pseuds Corner

Writing here last year...I warned of deeper divisions along racial, geographical and gender lines and foresaw the triumph of low-carb diets

'Trendspotter' MARIAN SALZMAN
Sunday Times

After an upbringing spent in a VW camper van travelling the world (her father is an adviser on global conflicts, her mother, Luciana Arrighi, an Oscar-winning production designer), [artist] Lali Chetwynd did something surprisingly conventional: a degree in social anthropology at UCL.

Observer

In a sense carpets can wake us up. If you think of the carpets themselves and perhaps what they have witnessed, the acts of love, of passion, of despair, depression, of hatred, of conflict, of strife, of success, of wealth, of joy, the carpets have seen all of these and over a period of time I think they become imbued or they can contain those qualities, those human qualities, and they bring us closer to some of the basic fundamentals of the human condition.

Oriental carpet collector ED KRAHER
Radio Four

We are the moving point on the blade of history held tight to our past by the spirit of now. Casting back to a period between Pepys and Churchill for the comfort of time and place which secures us for the unfolding road.

Mark Wilkinson Furniture website

"The building does not strive to be a perfect object... This is not a building: it is the encounter of different elements and their interactions that drive architectural form..." *[a-Graft]*

"In this context, the building will be a sort of folly." *[Foreign Office Architects]*

Extracts of briefs submitted by Architects for new Architecture Foundation HQ

Pseuds Educational

Sean [head teacher] is a firm believer in the fundamental importance of learning to learn and has introduced radical changes to lesson delivery.

He values heart and mind enhancement of systemic change and emphasises the optimism of self-belief.

From the brochure 'Leigh Park Education Action Zone, 2000-5'

Pseuds Corporate

I have a symbol of the new vibrant organisation I want to create. The symbol is a figure rising from the clouds holding a kite. The model says our spirits soar as we fly higher and higher. Written upon the kite tails are words describing what the organisation will feel like when it is vibrant.

These words include energy, passion, fun, commitment, can do, trust, sharing, ambition, making a difference, liberation, leadership, communication, creativity, learning, perform, inspiration, celebration, self-belief, pride, vision, quality, challenge.

This is the organisation that I want Bedfordshire to become, the kind of organisation that we can we achieve together.

Bedfordshire County Council Chief Executive ANDREA HILL's 'vision for Transforming Bedfordshire', quoted in HBS News

CONTRIBUTORS: Stephen Whittle, David French, B.D. Hazel, Anon, Jeff Heenan-Davies, Valentina Sloane, Will Pavia.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

TAX CREDITS

CHAOS THEORY

THERE is little indication that the Inland Revenue is resolving the chaos that has overwhelmed Gordon Brown's flagship tax credit scheme, designed to help families on low incomes.

Citizens Advice Bureaux are receiving thousands of requests each month for help from confused families, many of whom face severe financial hardship as the IR tries to claw back "overpaid" credits.

In many cases the IR has apologised to the families for what it admits was its own mistake in calculations. Nevertheless the onus is still on the families to prove that it was reasonable for them to believe that their award was correct.

But given the complexity of the tax credit scheme and the absence of relevant detail and information on award notices (revenue staff and accountants can't always agree on figures), Citizens Advice says it's impossible for families to understand the figures.

In the worst cases some families have simply had their tax credits stopped, leaving them in some cases unable to meet their weekly and monthly bills and having to apply for hardship funds. In one case a single mum with one child had her child tax credits reduced from £130 a week to £20 a week. She was told she'd been overpaid for 10 weeks (she had no idea why) so she would only get half what she should get each week for the rest of the year.

In another case, a Midlands family who only noticed that their £72 a week tax credits had been halted when they looked at their bank statement were offered three different explanations by the Inland Revenue.

Some families have received several different notices of their awards with no indication as to which is right. In one case a single mother received two notices sent on the same day. When she telephoned the no-helpline she was told that yet another notice with a different figure had also been sent on the same day.

Even when families have realised that there has been an overpayment, the Inland Revenue hasn't always allowed them to pay it back. Citizens Advice told the *Eye* of one woman who received a lump sum "underpayment" cheque of £3,500. She knew it to be wrong and returned it twice – only to have it sent back to her with advice from the helpline that she was definitely entitled to it and should bank it. After she cashed it, the IR realised its mistake.

Although many of the problems stem from the usual government computer cock-ups (courtesy of EDS) at the launch, the continuing mess has prompted opposition spokesmen to urge the IR to seek to reclaim overpayments only where there are clear indications of fraud. The issue is likely to dominate the agenda when the public accounts committee meets at the end of the month to consider the critical report on the affair by Sir John Bourn, the auditor-general. The Inland Revenue has yet to calculate the scale of the problem properly but at least one in four calculations is believed to be incorrect.

BNFL SELL-OFF

Nuclear banker

LAST July *Eye* 1109 speculated how government-owned British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) had been teed up for privatisation by the transfer of its expensive liabilities, such as the Magnox power stations and the Sellafield reprocessing plant, to the nuclear decommissioning authority (NDA).

Announcing dire financial results, BNFL's chief executive Mike Parker pointed out that, once these responsibilities had been shed, the company would be transformed from a £300m-a-year loss-making ugly duckling into a shiny new contractor earning around £250m from cleaning up nuclear sites without the bother of owning them or carrying the associated risks.

Six months later the *Independent* has discovered that the government is indeed touting part of the old BNFL for sale. The man given the task is Richard Gillingwater, head of a "new" Labour creation within the cabinet office called the "shareholder executive" which is charged with getting the best performance from publicly-owned companies for the taxpayer.

As a former investment banker, Gillingwater is naturally trying to do this by flogging off the profit-making part of BNFL, now called British Nuclear Group (BNG), and leaving the taxpayer with the bill for all the contaminated sites.

Gillingwater was appointed in September 2003 by then cabinet officer minister and former trade union firebrand Lord (Gus) McDonald from Credit Suisse First Boston (CSFB). As revealed in the last *Eye*, this is the same investment bank that recently received £11m from the government to advise on the restructuring of privatised nuclear generator British Energy after numerous taxpayer-funded bail-outs.

When he was given the shareholder executive job, the cabinet office boasted that his "recent work on behalf of the government has included the British Energy rescue and advice in connection with the restructuring of BNFL." In other words, one day he was an investment banker advising the government as his client; the next he was in charge of the body deciding what to do based on his own (very expensive) advice. Unsurprisingly, the CSFB man behind the original scheme to ring-fence the juicy part of BNFL has concluded that it should be sold – with another nice pay day in prospect for the bankers.

Nobody, least of all the cabinet office, spotted any potential conflict of interest in Gillingwater's appointment. At the time he enthused about the "challenge of building up the shareholder executive, contributing to advice on BNFL, British Energy and Royal Mail, amongst others".

As BNFL is broken up leaving the taxpayer with a contaminated mess, British Energy lurches from one crisis to another and hundreds of post offices close, taxpayers must be grateful they have a proven banker like Richard Gillingwater safeguarding their interests.

PRIVATISATION

Ire brigade

A number of firms with less than glowing reputations are poised to bid to take over the fire brigade's 999 service in Britain.

The privatisation is controversial anyway. A confidential government report says the scheme has a "very high risk" of "total project failure". So far, so bad.

The Fire Brigades Union has leaked the evaluation by the office of the deputy prime minister on the "Firecontrol Project", under which the fire brigade's control centres will be privatised, cut from 46 to nine and staff will be reduced by more than half. The leaked report warns of a high risk of failure at a possible cost of £754m. The scheme could lose £107m, it is said, but promises possible savings of just £42m.

Private Eye has obtained the government's list of possible bidders and they include SAIC, an American firm whose work running the Iraq Media Network, a TV station supposedly modelled on the BBC, has been heavily criticised.

After 11 months the Pentagon took SAIC's contract away and gave it to another firm. It said SAIC's station was amateurish and it also wasted money. The Pentagon's inspector-general audited the contract and noted that costs shot up from $15m to $82m. The inspector concluded that the US "cannot be assured that it was either provided [with] the best contracting solution or paid fair and reasonable prices for the goods and services purchased".

Meanwhile another American military firm, Northrop Grumman, is also on John Prescott's list of possible fire brigade bidders. It also worked in Iraq, its subsidiary Vinnell winning a $48m contract to train the new Iraqi army. Alas, the US panicked after realising how badly the new soldiers were being trained, brought in the Jordanian army to help and did not extend Vinnell's contract.

Northrop itself has been repeatedly fined by the US government. In 2003 it paid $20m for selling defective equipment to the navy and $60m for overcharging on warship work.

French arms firm Thales is also on Prescott's list of bidders. It is at the centre of numerous Gallic scandals (and is also currently renting Tony Blair's Bristol flats for its executives). Cogent Defence, Arinc, BT, Hewlett Packard and Unisys complete the list.

PROTECTED TENANCIES

Loopy loophole

MOUNTVIEW Estates, the multi-million pound property giant, appears to have found a neat loophole in the law which enables it to grab ownership of protected tenants' homes from under their noses.

Simon Suckling and partner Patricia Austin, along with their pensioner neighbour Patrick Stephens, are long-standing tenants (20 and 30 years respectively) in their flats in Twickenham, west London, and are protected under the rent act 1977.

If the freehold of their flats were to be put on the market, they as tenants would expect to be offered first refusal. But under the landlord and tenant act 1987, landlords are allowed to sell off flats individually without offering the freehold to protected tenants.

Thus, what happened at 72 The Green, Twickenham, was that the owners, Robert and Frederick Taylor, sold long leases of the two flats to two different men, Anthony Haines and Paul Thompson. Haines and Thompson both happen to be directors of different property companies, listed at the same address in Wimbledon. And on that very same day they both sold their individual purchases straight on to… Mountview Estates.

These separate sales resulted in Mountview (whose chair Duncan Sinclair features on the *Sunday Times* rich list) obtaining the entire property and wasting no time in pushing up the rents while, according to Mr Suckling, paying little on the upkeep of the building, which is damp, has rotting windows and no central heating.

In a test case the tenants of 72 The Green are to take Mountview to court in an attempt to close the loophole and force Mountview to sell them back their leases. Simon Suckling said: "This seems like a neat way of getting round legislation that was designed to protect people like ourselves. We hope the case will at the very least highlight the problem and force a change to close a loophole that we understand is regularly being exploited."

Last week Mountview denied it had flouted any law but refused to discuss its tactics. A spokesman said the matter was in the hands of solicitors and would be dealt with in court.

POLICE CORRUPTION

Murdered by the Met?

THE FAMILY of private investigator Daniel Morgan, brutally murdered in a south London pub car park 17 years ago, are about to launch a high court challenge to the home office's refusal to order a public inquiry.

Four police investigations – the last of which concluded only last year – have failed to bring anyone to account for the death of the 37-year-old father of two, who was found with an axe buried in his face. Last year in their book *Untouchables*, Michael Gillard and Laurie Flynn suggested Mr Morgan had been about to blow the whistle on major police corruption.

Mr Morgan's family's anxieties have increased with every flawed police investigation into the death. In particular, their concerns about the role of former Metropolitan police sergeant Sid Fillery, who initially played a key part in the police investigation into the murder, but who was subsequently accused of being involved, have never been answered.

Last month, despite a Commons debate highlighting Fillery's dubious role and demands for a judicial inquiry from 83 MPs, Hazel Blears, minister for policing, wrote to the family's London lawyers, Bhatt Murphy, saying an inquiry was not in the public interest. She said that while she "understood concerns raised about the investigations, I have concluded that, taken together, those investigations have been effective" and that they had found "no plausible evidence of police corruption".

The lawyers will challenge that decision on the grounds that it is perverse, that the public interest demands in cases of the most serious allegations of police corruption and cover-up that there must be a full inquiry, and that under human rights legislation they are entitled to a full and public investigation.

Mr Morgan had repeatedly expressed his concerns about corrupt officers in south London and had particular concerns about his partner Jonathan Rees's friendships with and hiring of off-duty officers for agency work. At the 1988 inquest into his death Kevin Lennon, a book-keeper employed by the detective agency, Southern Investigations Ltd, made the sensational claim that Rees and officers, including Fillery, had planned the murder and arranged for officers from Catford CID to be involved in it and in a subsequent cover-up.

In a Commons debate last July, Lib Dem MP Roger Williams, who with former culture secretary Chris Smith MP and Lord Livsey has long campaigned for a judicial inquiry, said that Fillery was one of the Catford officers who played a crucial role in the vital first four "golden days" of the murder inquiry. He had conducted the first interview with his friend Rees – who was a prime suspect – and he had had the opportunity to take possession of key documents, including Morgan's diary, which has never been found. He said that the book-keeper, Lennon, had also spoken of Fillery's intention to retire from the Met and take up the seat in Southern Investigations left by Mr Morgan's death – which is what happened. Fillery was taken off the case after his friendship with Rees became known.

Since then it has emerged that in the initial police investigation officers never bothered to check the alibis of five of six arrested suspects; that forensics were botched; that Mr Morgan's Rolex watch was stolen – not by the murderer as believed by the family at the time, but while police were investigating the murder.

Rees was subsequently jailed for arranging with others to plant drugs on an innocent woman and in a separate case Fillery was sentenced to a community rehabilitation order after admitting 13 counts of making indecent images of children.

Mr Williams said Blears' response "had the Metropolitan police written all over it… The home office maintains that despite only one of six alibis of the main suspects being checked and despite interference with the scene of crime, that the first murder investigation was up to the standards of the day. Even by 18th century standards it is evidence of severe mishandling".

MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE

Smoking is bad for you

ANDREW ALLDER (pictured right) says he spent 17 years in prison for having a crafty cigarette.

His alibi for the murder of an Aylesbury shop assistant – that he was in a nearby social security office at the time of the stabbing – fell down because he had popped out of the DSS office for a smoke.

Although several witnesses, including his father and brother, testified that he was in the DSS office both before and after the time of the killing of 67-year-old Kathleen Turner, police maintained that Mr Allder had a window of opportunity to commit the murder when he slipped outside for a fag.

A police keep fit enthusiast said Allder had the time to run the 600 yards to Dennis' Leather goods store in Kingsbury Square, stab Mrs Turner and run back again – even though none of the many witnesses reported anything changed or odd in his behaviour.

At the time of the murder Allder was a troubled 17-year-old. He only came to the notice of police because, following a TV news report on the day of the murder suggesting that "a man with ginger hair was seen running nearby shortly afterwards", he felt he ought to eliminate himself from inquiries. He did indeed have ginger hair and had run to a meeting with his social worker after he left the DSS offices – an account later confirmed by the social worker.

Mr Allder went to the police station at 7.30pm and was interviewed by two detectives. They took his clothes for forensic examination and questioned him until after midnight. At the end of the interview the officers told him they did not believe his story and that he was being arrested for murder.

After more than 24 hours in custody and without a lawyer or his father present, during questioning the following evening Allder signed a "confession". He repeated his "confession" twice more during the night. Although he later retracted it at his trial, he was convicted by a crown court jury in January 1988 with a recommendation from the judge that he serve a minimum of 10 years.

By always protesting his innocence he was deemed to be not "addressing" his offending and so served a total of 17 years before finally being released last year. But the circumstances surrounding the confessions – particularly the absence of any traces of blood on his clothing, or indeed any forensic evidence connecting him with the crime, a murder weapon or the shop, not to mention his almost perfect alibi – should have raised alarm bells.

They are certainly now ringing for those preparing his case for the criminal cases review commission. They maintain that as a vulnerable person aged 17 he should have had a responsible adult present during questioning; that under the police and criminal evidence act, his interviews should have been taped or recorded in full (there is no account of long periods of interview); and that the confession statements are inconsistent not only with each other but with the facts surrounding the killing too.

FINANCIAL REGULATION

Howard's way

WHEN Sir Howard Davies retired from the financial services authority and took a well-paid job at investment bank Morgan Stanley a year ago, there were high hopes the bank would clean up its act.

At the time it was reeling from hundreds of millions of dollars in fines from US regulators for offences ranging from issuing favourable "independent" research on its own clients to dodgy trades in mutual funds.

A former top regulator was what Morgan Stanley needed, and Sir Howard seemed to fit the bill perfectly. As chairman Phil Purcell put it: "His public policy DNA will add an important dimension to Morgan Stanley governance."

Alas, one dimension Sir Howard is yet to add is a respect for the basic rules under which public companies operate, leading last week to the largest fine ever handed out by the New York stock exchange, $13m, for "numerous supervisory, operational and technological deficiencies" and giving inaccurate reports to the exchange.

If Mr Purcell is disappointed that Sir Howard's public policy DNA hasn't brought his firm into line, he perhaps shouldn't be too surprised. When in charge at the FSA in 2003 Sir Howard identified among investment banks in the UK the same bent research that his American counterparts had punished so heavily. Sir Howard, by contrast, consulted the banks and took the brave decision not to investigate or fine any of them.

Talking sop

THE national audit office (NAO) and the department of trade's "better regulation taskforce" have made a topical choice for the guest speaker at their joint conference next month on "Sharing Best Practice: Better Regulation & Independent Regulators".

Delegates from various regulatory bodies will benefit from the expertise on this subject of the chairman of the financial sevices authority, Callum McCarthy. As explained in the last Eye (see *In the City*), Mr McCarthy has just presided over the negotiation of a paltry settlement with 18 companies responsible for what he memorably described to parliament as "collusion on a very substantial scale" in the split capital trust scandal.

The companies fobbed off Mr McCarthy's FSA with a meagre £194m settlement, (£156m less than he originally asked for), a few slapped wrists and no prosecutions. Who better to lecture the country's regulators on "best practice" than the tough-talking FSA boss?

PFI Watch

AS AN influential report from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants showed how PFI contracts to build roads "created additional costs and risks to… the public sector as a whole, through tax concessions that must increase costs to the taxpayer and/or reduce service provision" (Eye 1119), the government body responsible for road-building, the Highways Agency, has appointed a director to bring "external expertise to support decision-making by the board."

He is Alex Jablonowski, formerly responsible for corporate banking at Barclays Bank. Among the most important decisions he will have to help the Highways Agency make will be how to pay for the seemingly endless programme of road construction: in particular whether PFI should be used despite growing evidence that it is gives taxpayers pisspoor value for money.

Barclays, where Mr Jablonowski has worked for 30 years, is one of the most active funders of PFI projects, so don't expect a change in road financing any time soon.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE septic isle of Jersey has attracted many curious relationships, usually driven by its prime tax haven status; but few in recent years seem as odd as that with Rwandan president Paul Kagame, brought about by one of the island's richer residents, Canadian multi-millionaire John W. Dick.

Kagame made a first discreet, private visit to Jersey in May 2003 as a guest of Dick, who is the seigneur, or lord of the manor, of St John, one of 12 such feudal relics. Last month the Rwandan president returned with a delegation for a five-day visit. This saw Kagame feted not just by Dick but leading Jersey dignitaries and officials too. There was much talk of mutual opportunities in agriculture and tourism, not to mention financial services.

Jersey is desperate to find new sources of revenue as it is losing out to other havens just as the government's finances are under increasing strain from ever-rising social costs. Dick, it transpires, is the Rwandan consul-general in Jersey and travels regularly to the central African state where he is developing broadband telecommunications interests, as well as advising on redeveloping the capital, Kigali.

The Canadian made his money mainly in property, particularly in Denver, Colorado, before moving into and out of European Ferries. Dick moved to Jersey in 1980 buying a 250-acre estate. He was briefly jailed for contempt in 1993 as part of a bitter divorce battle with his American wife. The former Mrs Dick claimed her husband had helped a business partner of President Bush's brother Neil stash $20m in Jersey after borrowing heavily from the failed Silverado Savings & Loan where Neil Bush was a director. This was denied by all concerned. Dick was sued for $3.5m over a loan from another failed S&L.

Dick invited Kagame to Denver in April last year as part of a fund-raising exercise to send medical aid to Rwanda. Dick says he was introduced to Kagame by an American businessman and that the Rwandan president wanted his help to rebuild the country still suffering from the effects of the genocide 10 years ago and the ongoing civil war in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). By coincidence Dick at one time was an investor in the DRC.

Kagame's latest trip to Jersey coincided with growing concern at the United Nations over Rwandan incursions into the DRC to engage the remnants of the Hutu extremists responsible for the slaughter of more than 500,000 Tutsis in Rwanda. There are also reports of DRC tantalite and cassiterite mineral deposits being looted by Rwandan-linked militias. However, Jersey's tin pot dignitaries showed no concern over such issues. Presumably no Rwandan ill-gotten gains have found their way into Jersey bank or trust company accounts.

Kagame is seen as an ally of Washington and London in the Great Lakes region, despite the reservations of human rights groups. Like Kagame, who is accused by political opponents of acting like a dictator, Dick assures that he is only interested in helping Rwanda. Which must be true.

Last year an investigation by the Jersey financial services commission (JFSC) discovered evidence that a surprising number of local companies were engaged in legal arms deals, including the supply of helicopters for use in the DRC which were supposedly being flown around Greek islands. It can safely be assumed that John Dick would not be party to any such transactions.

Jersey is said to be losing increasing offshore business to havens such as Dubai, Singapore and Mauritius who are seen as more secure and less likely to cooperate with inquiries from authorities elsewhere.

From July this year – assuming Switzerland and other continental havens have implemented the agreement – Jersey, like Guernsey and the Isle of Man, will put into effect the European savings tax directive which will see it charge a withholding tax on EU residents' deposits. Some see this as the first step to exchanging information with the tax authorities where the depositors are resident – as yet dependent on the depositor's unlikely agreement – making Jersey a far less secret haven. This development has hit Jersey hard and questioned the island's gamble of basing its finances entirely on the offshore financial sector.

As a result of the need to stay competitive, insiders say that the JFSC has adopted a new, softer approach to transgressions by local banks and trust companies. Evidence of this is seen in the decision not to proceed against Standard Chartered for blatant breaches of the Iraqi sanctions order which saw more than £4m transferred out of Iraqi-linked accounts held by the bank's Jersey trust company.

The JFSC has also indicated that it is not keen to be seen to be punishing local banks and trust companies thereby hurting Jersey's "reputation" and will be more likely to go for private censures than public fines. At a recent meeting, a senior JFSC executive questioned whether fines were the best solution and admitted that deciding how to punish offenders was "difficult".

This view is not shared by the Fundamentally Supine Authority which is busily fining banks and brokers like never before – where it has evidence and the targets roll over, unlike in the "splits" scandal. However, it is a pro-business view that is being pushed in Washington within the securities and exchange commission (SEC) as a reaction to the post-Enron stream of prosecutions. The argument is that fines punish shareholders, not directors. So why not just fine the suits? Presumably because they may not be able to pay the seven-figure sums.

But clearly in the case of Jersey the authorities there are keen to demonstrate, as seen by their fawning over Kagame, that they are as ever open for business from anyone.

PRESUMABLY the Inland Revenue will be taking no interest in the Dear Leader's use of the Queen's Flight to ferry him and the Blair family to their Egyptian Christmas holiday at a cost of £100,000.

Blair, we are told, has made an undisclosed contribution towards the bill based on the cost of the charter flight he used last year. And security issues are expected to trump the fact that the tax legislation, while making an exception for politicians' homes regarding security, is silent on the provision of private jets.

However, tax experts point out that company executives face bills of 40 percent on the difference between the actual cost and reimbursed amount if the flight is seen as a benefit in kind which use of a company jet for a family holiday would probably indeed be adjudged.

The fact that they might make a few business phone calls while on holiday would be unlikely to satisfy the tax inspector. Similarly, the value of the benefit is unlikely to be met by the cost of travelling as cheaply as possible. Indeed, that would increase the potential tax liability. More likely would be at least first class fares all round.

Perhaps it is time for more transparency on the prime minister's personal finances. His master Dubya has to disclose much more to his own electorate. Something for Gordon Brown to consider regarding his former friend.

A STUDY of company records raises interesting questions about home secretary Charles Clarke's business career before he became a minister.

Clarke was a director and chief executive of management consultants Quality Public Affairs from 1994 until 1999. The company gave its registered office as the House of Commons after Clarke became an MP in 1997. QPA was said to have been paid fees of up to £1,000 a day. Yet surprisingly the company was described by Clarke as dormant, ie did not trade, in the accounts for 1995, 1996 and 1997.

The company did not file any accounts in the next two years before it was dissolved in November 1999. Not filing accounts is potentially a criminal offence and usually generates

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

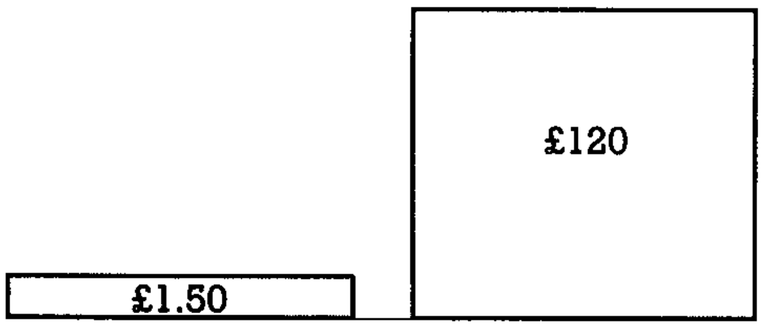
BUY MEGASIZE MEGA BURGERS
LET'S FACE IT- WE STILL RELY ON THE POOR OLD WORKERS TO KEEP THE ECONOMY BOOMING!
YES - BUT THINGS HAVE CHANGED. IN VICTORIAN TIMES THEY HAD TO SHOVEL COAL INTO FURNACES...
...NOWADAYS THEY HAVE TO SHOVEL FOOD INTO THEIR FACES!
EXIT
LITTER

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

MyNightmare

Value of £100 invested five years ago in...



...'Airtours' parent **MyTravel**

...Rival **First Choice**

automatic civil penalties by Companies House. Perhaps the ambitious and busy Clarke was really trading as QPA rather than the company itself trading. Or maybe it ceased trading once he joined the government payroll in 1998. But that still does not excuse the non-filing of accounts. Hardly a good example for Britain's new Mr Law 'n' Order.

WHILE the Serious Farce Office is into its second year of considering the undoubted fraud at investment group Imperial Consolidated, liquidators from accountants Mazars continue to be busy seeking to trace the $250m paid out by the company which collapsed in 2002.

They have issued proceedings against Robert Raven, a director and close associate of Imperial founders Lincoln Fraser and Jared Brook, seeking more than $120m including $6m paid to Raven, his wife and a Raven company in commissions. It will be interesting to see if the SFO makes a decision to prosecute before the first anniversary of Fraser and Brooks' arrest next month.

Even more solidly locked in the overdue department is a decision on the £33m made to disappear from dot-com shell Izodia. This seemingly simple case resulted in raids on the offices of companies in the Orb group run by convicted fraudster Gerald Smith two years ago.

However, a quick decision was reached by the SFO about not wanting to get involved in an investigation of the fraud and corruption allegations made by the European Commission's sacked chief accountant Marta Andreasen regarding the EU budget. Andreasen and MEP Ashley Mote made allegations regarding the EU's accounting systems last October. Perhaps not surprisingly the SFO has decided it has enough problems proving fraud at home without crossing the Channel to Brussels so has decided these are not matters it can investigate.

WINNER of the *Vote For Me* reality TV show Rodney Hylton-Potts has even more claims to fame as a potential MP than a five-year sentence for mortgage fraud.

The "comedy fascist" played a key role in the shadowy offshore deals after three Westminster cemeteries were sold by council leader Lady Porter for £1 in 1987. Hylton-Potts acted for John Whybrow who acquired the cemeteries from the original mystery purchaser and then sold them on making £500,000 within hours.

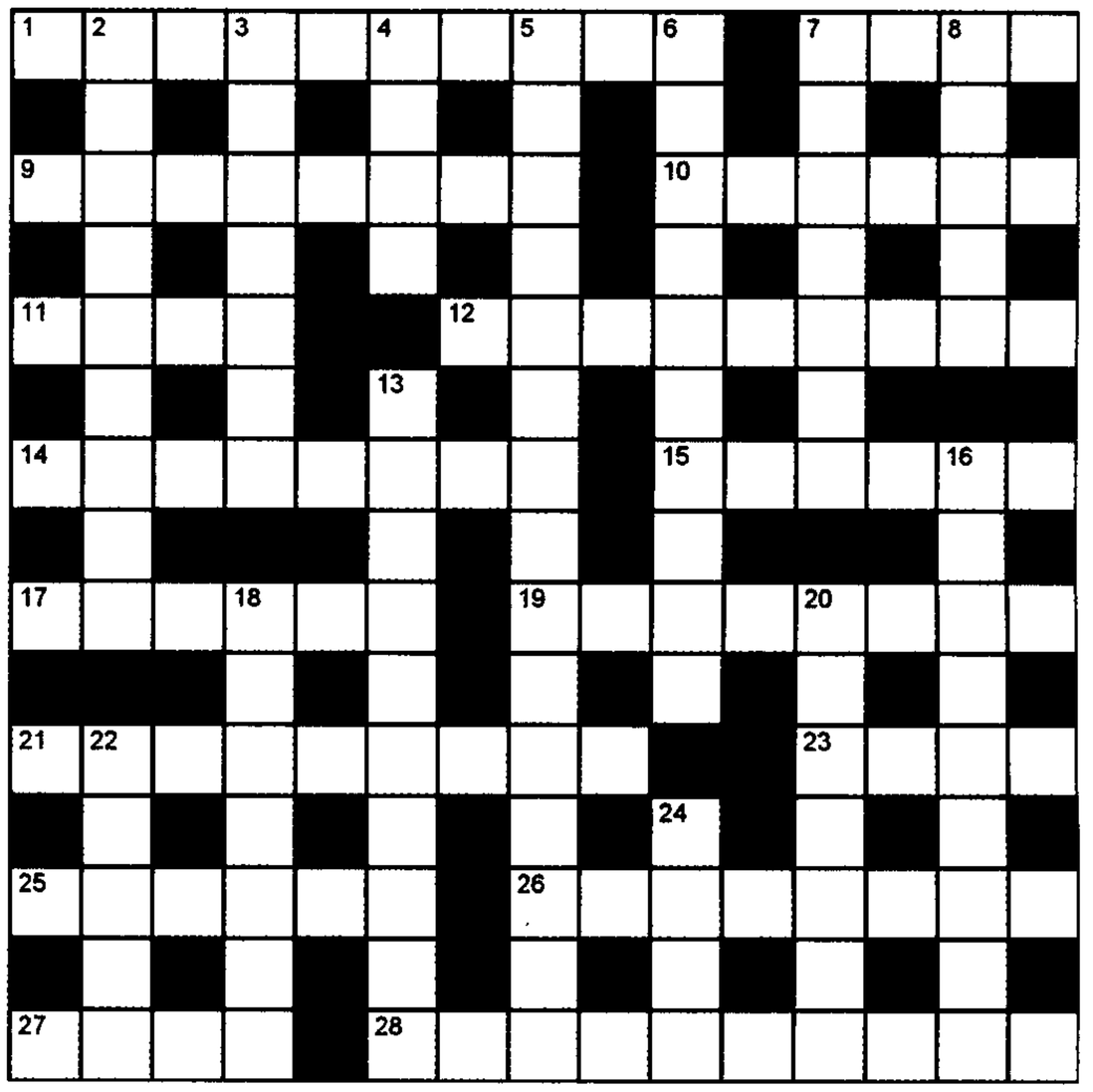
Whybrow was jailed with Hylton-Potts in 1996 for a £2.3m mortgage fraud. Another colourful Hylton-Potts client was Asil Nadir's one-time stockbroker Jason Davies while he was a fugitive from justice over charges relating to manipulating the Polly Peck share price. Since being released in 1998 Hylton-Potts acts as a legal consultant describing himself, despite having been struck off by the Law Society, as a "top international lawyer" and member of the "international, Federal and New York bar associations". Just the man to make even Tory leader Michael Howard look good if he carries out his threat to stand as an independent candidate in Folkestone.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 279

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 28 January 2005
Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Wobble-arse Nadir (4,6)
7 Screw gets head replaced for a dollar (4)
9 Patriotic figure shows way to get stuffed; England's first to get shoved in (2,6)
10 Idiot Ken's last to abandon London's fiasco with Tube closure (6)
11 Will the impenetrable columnist take heroine from the rack? (4)
12 Opening of curly mound pressed against tool – tawdry! (9)
14 Tony's half into Attlee, jumping on the wagon (8)
15 Wannabe journo is kissing Beckham's butt – that's art! (6)
17 What shows nations' positions on Taliban's initiative, finally? (2,4)
19 Shagging traditionally on the menu at Christmas? (8)
21 Place underground to watch a Paxman grilling? (9)
23 Party's suppressing Prescott's last points (4)
25 Carrots give Brown one form of BSE (6)
26 Top pair of Nigella Lawson unsettled a Torygraph columnist (1,1,6)
27 Elegant note, the sound of one who's pissed (4)
28 Mean, pissed rat died (5-5)

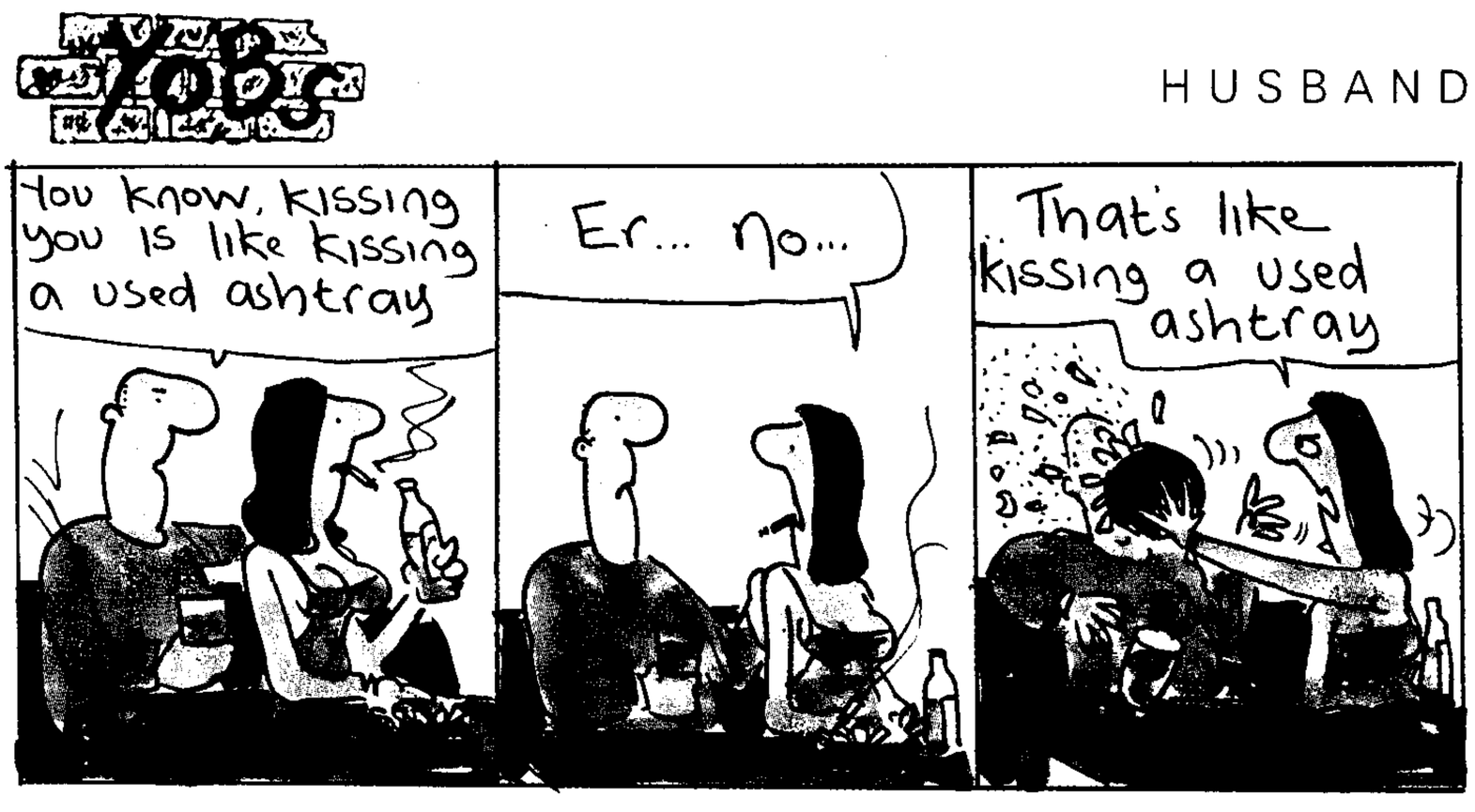
DOWN

2 Tone felt peculiar nursing hard political stance like this? (2,3,4)
3 Giving the castle a seizure is what Di liked to do! (4,3)
4 Rows about ending of piss artist circle (4)
5 Old rockers and the French girl shag and everything (3,5,7)
6 Right-wing pressure group's "back to work time" getting some stick (6,4)
7 "I can't be bothered with employment" – head (4,3)
8 "Gut-ache" Gadaffi possibly in charge (5)
13 Jiggling Evita's tits – journey to foreign parts for Blair? (5,5)
16 Tabloid attack resulting from "Phew What a Scorcher!"? (9)
18 One like Milosevic, reportedly in charge of tart (7)
20 One with itchy fingers, no stranger to G strings (7)
22 Ollie's negative HRT therapy (5)
24 Some idiot in South-West Water? (4)

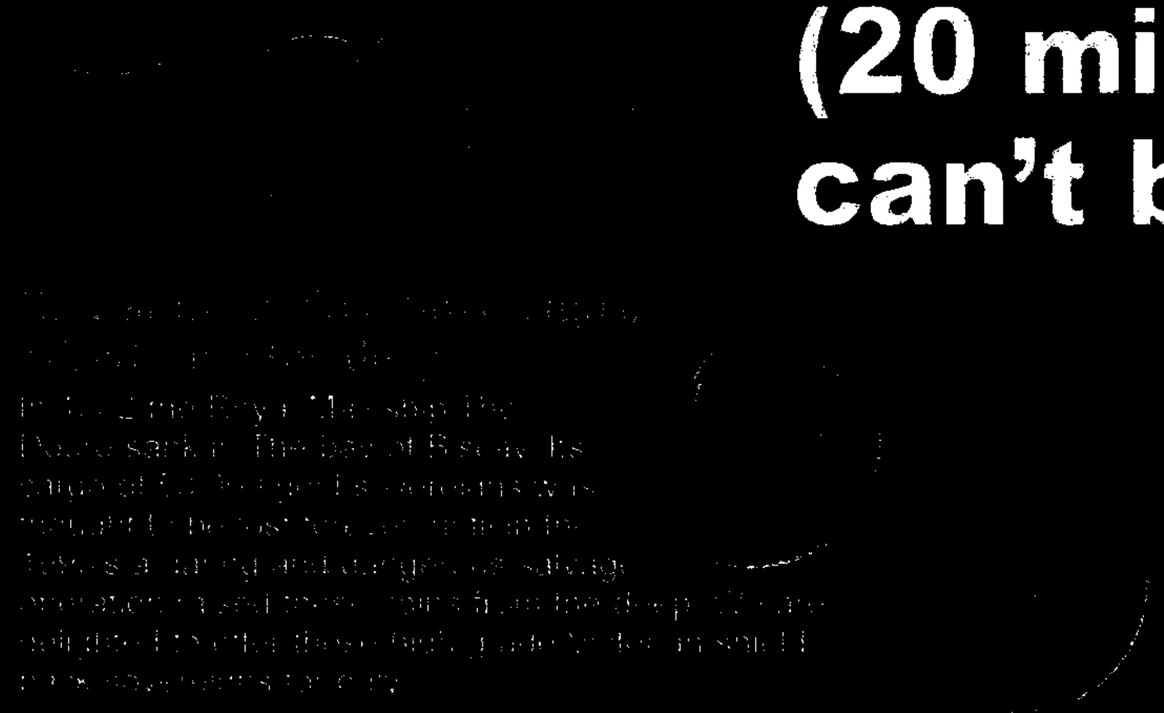
Crossword 278 winner: MIKE CORNFORD

ACROSS: 8 Rio Grande 9 Pay up 11 Basic 12 Bottled up 13 Bogside 15 Georgia 17 Blindman's Buff 22 Muggins 24 Machete 25 Uplifters 27 Logic 29 Tacit 30 Seatstick.

DOWN: 1 Crybaby 2/7 Boss-eyed 3 Erection 4 Unable 5 Pentagon 6 Apollo 10 Poplar 14 Gulag 16 Gaffe 18 Masseuse 19 Backlash 20 Amount 21 Tea cake 23 In fits 24 Mishap 28/26 Gridlock.

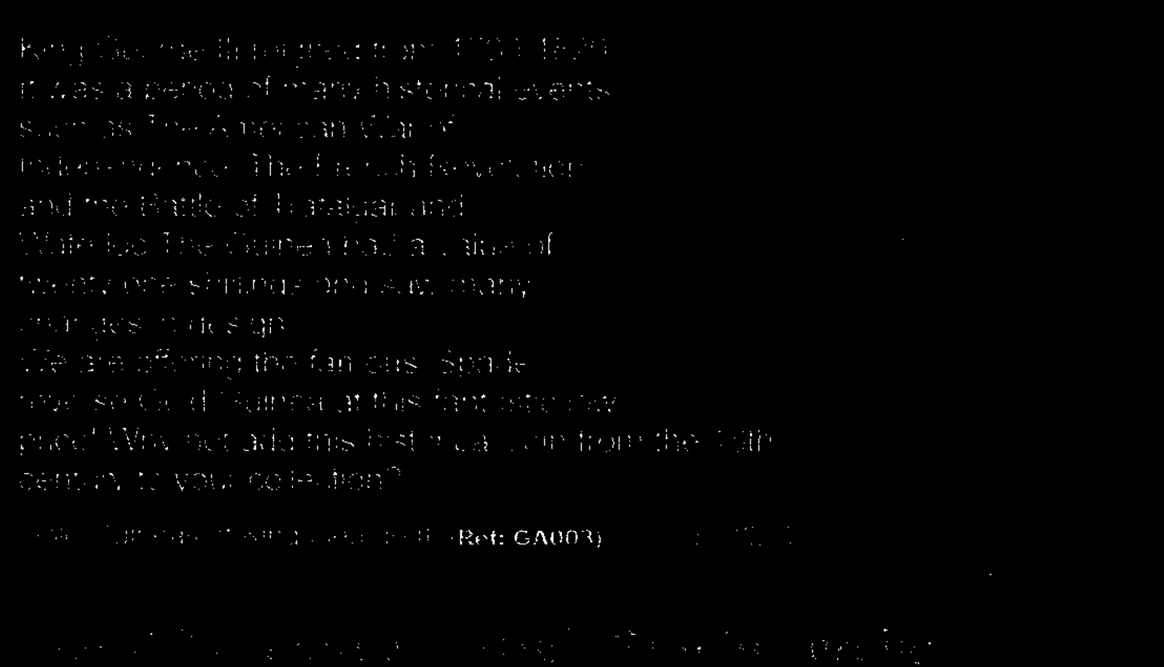


Invest in
(20 million Arabs can't be wrong!)



(Ref: GA001)

(Ref: GA002)



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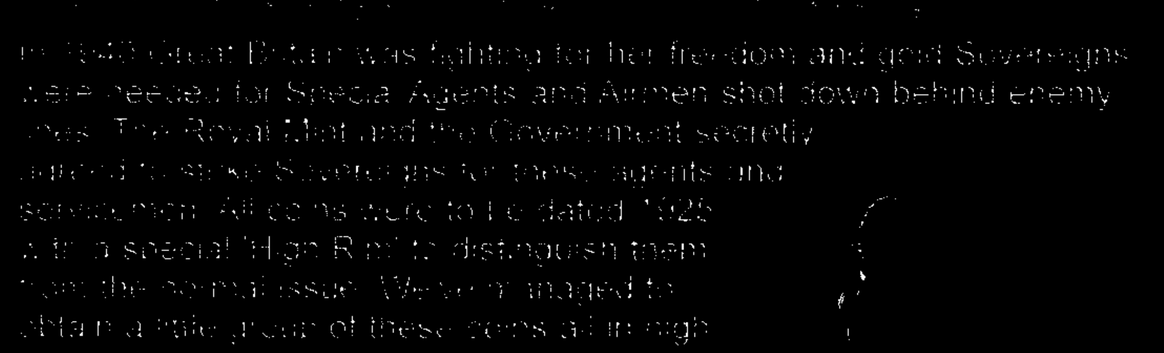

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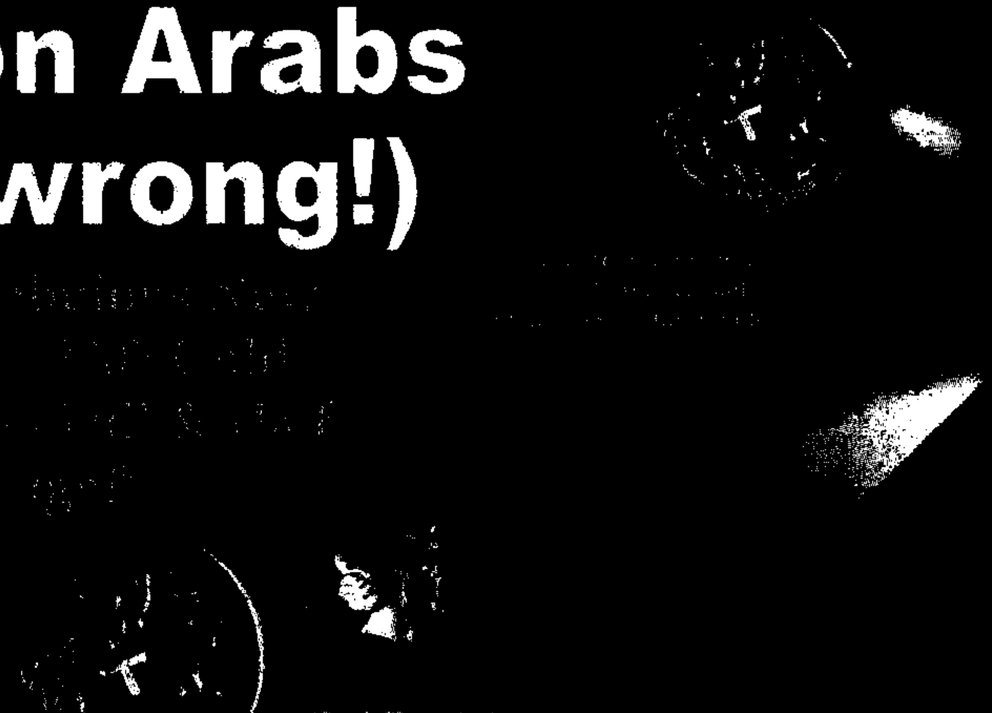

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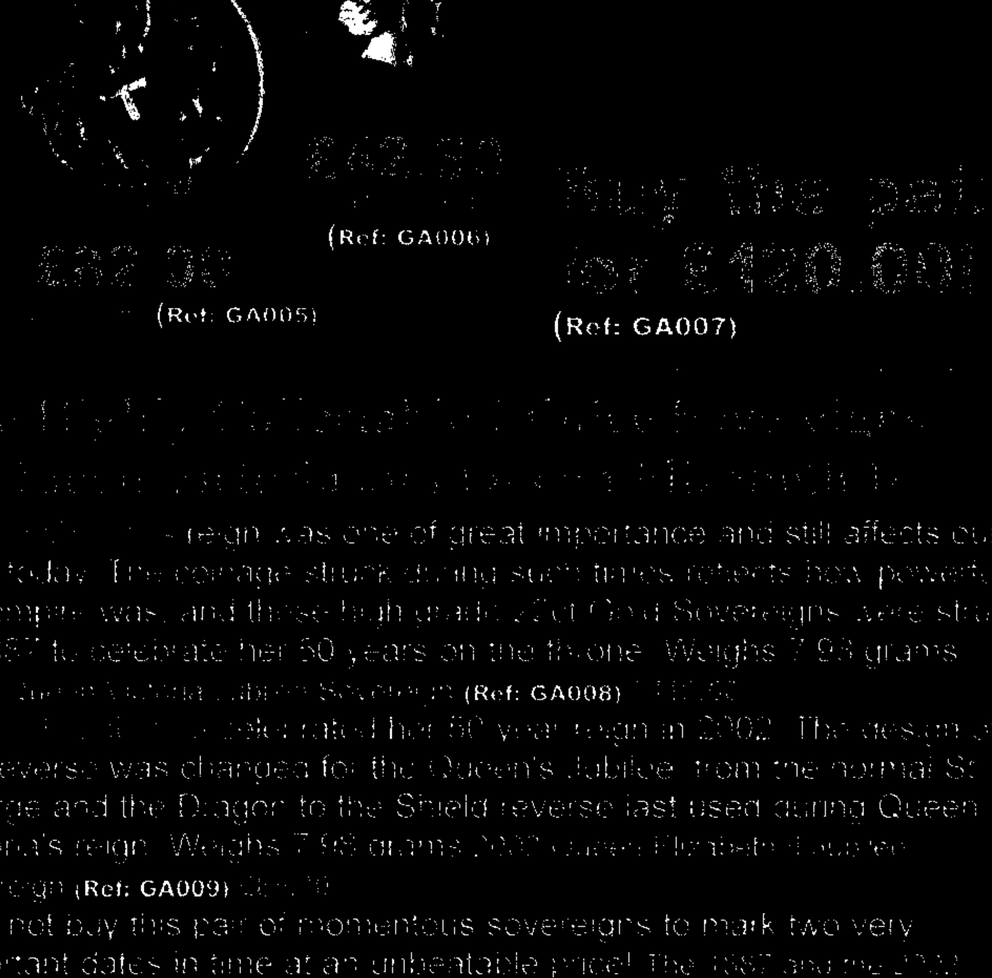

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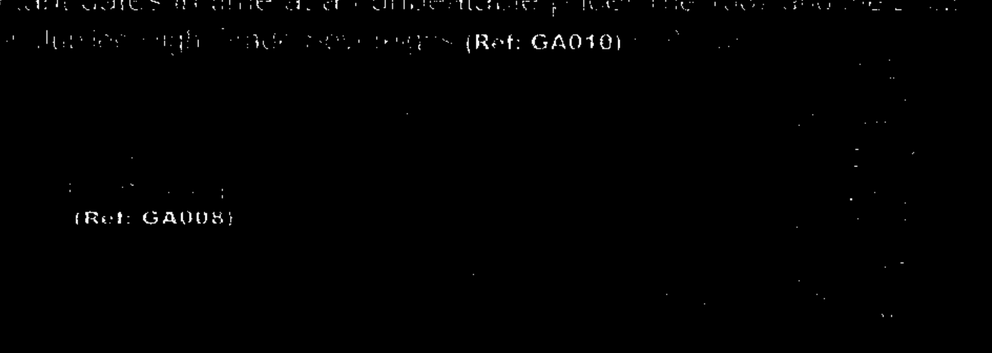

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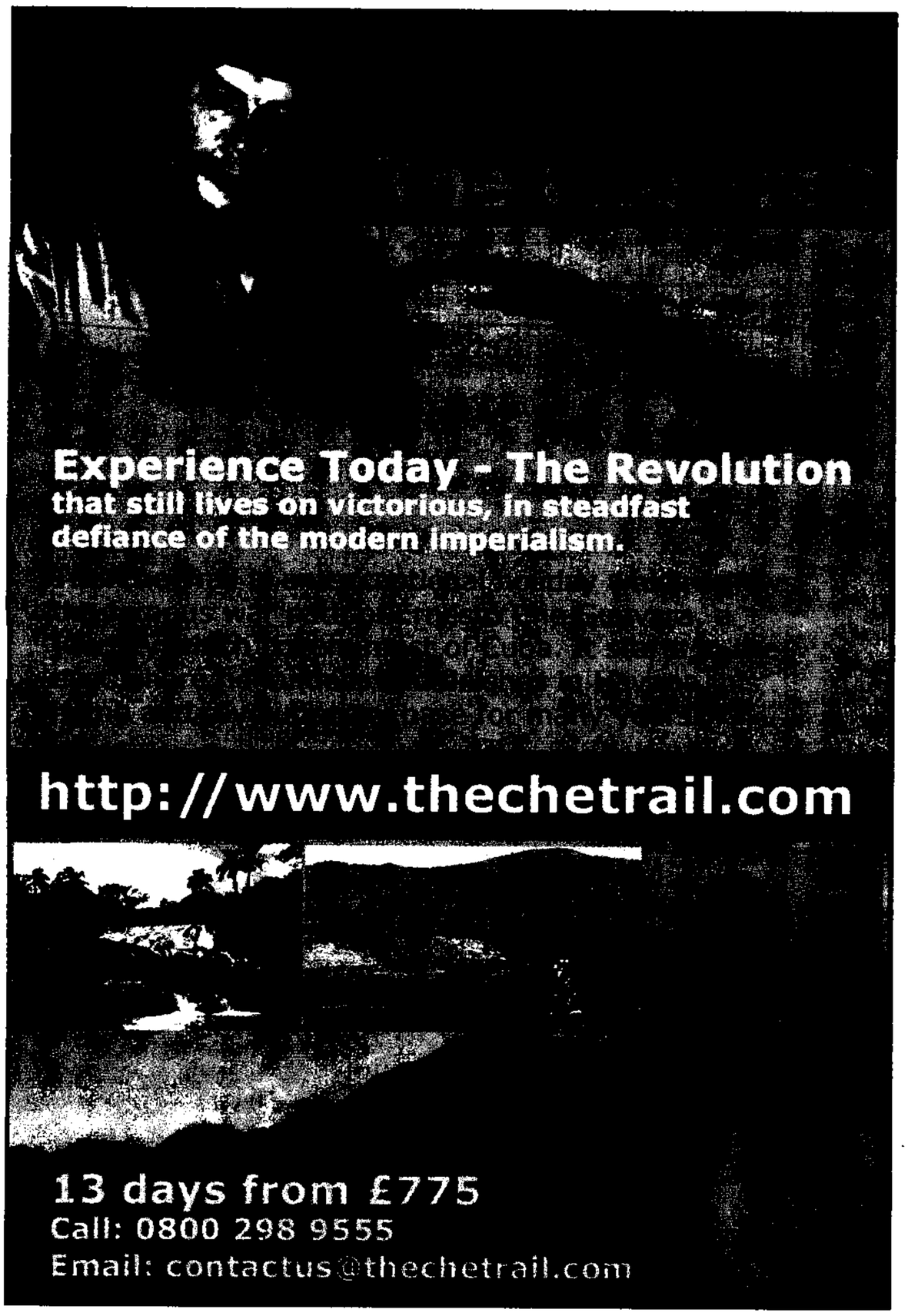
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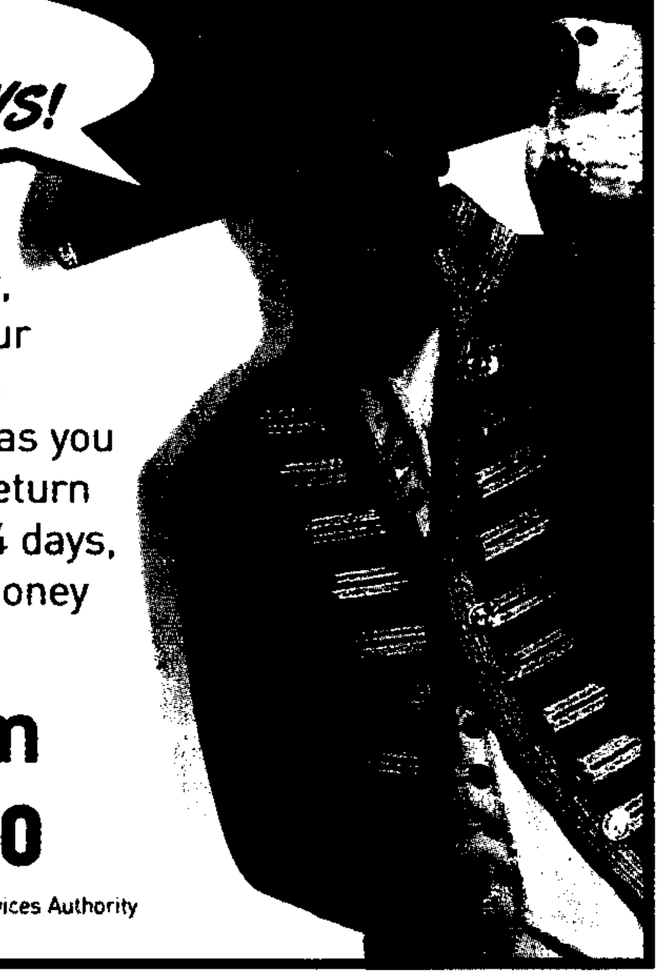

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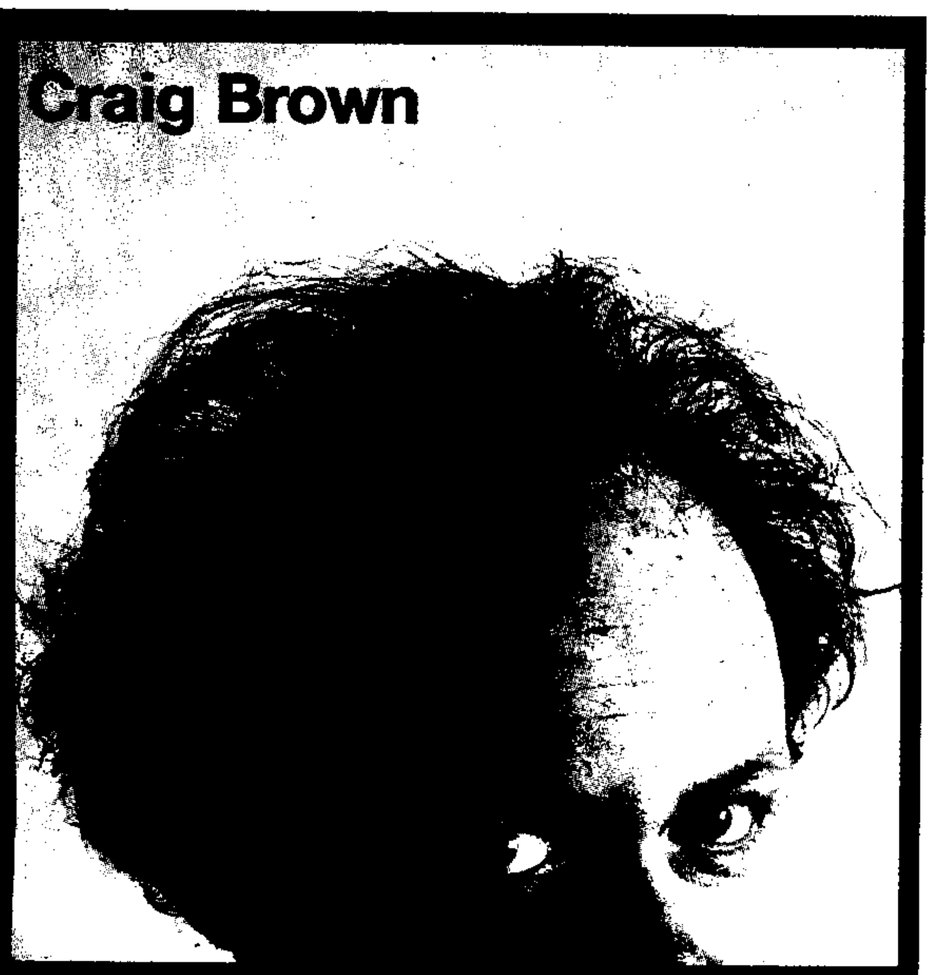

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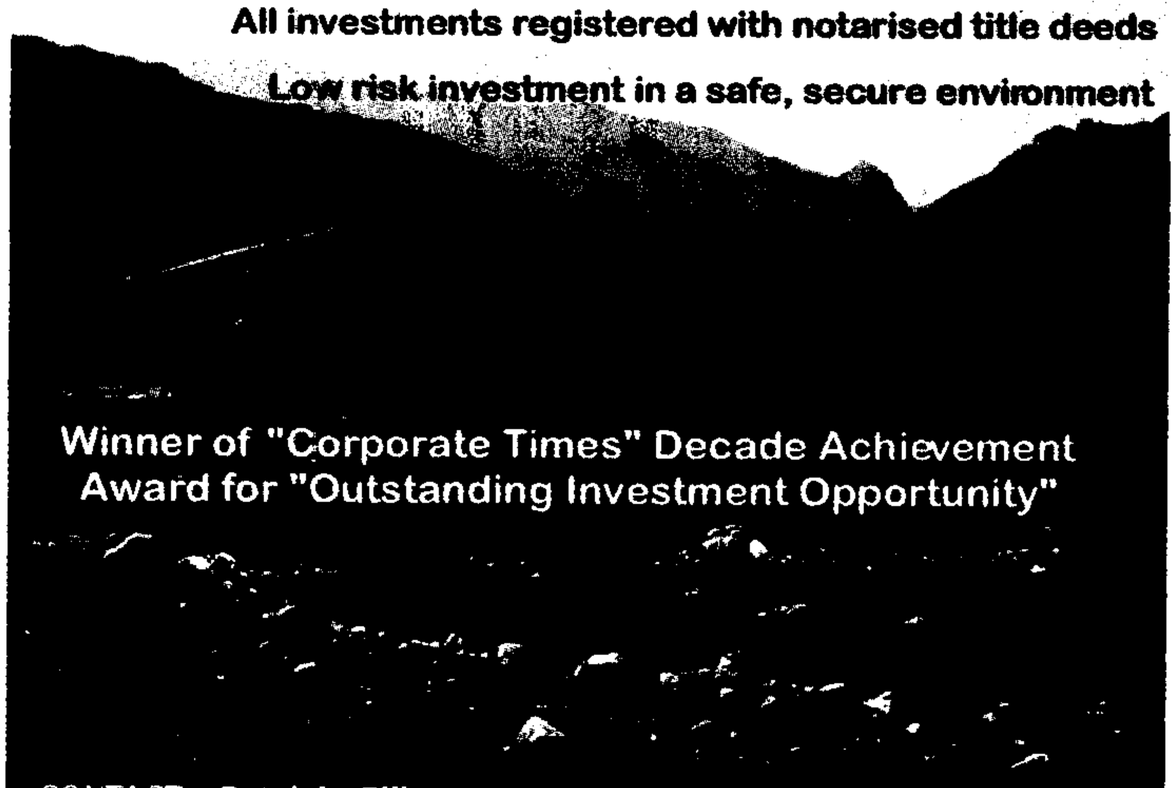

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GET YOUR GREAT BRITISH gold coins (before Mr Brown gives them all to Brussels). See page 30.

PRIVATE EYE ISSUES from 10 October 1969 (204) to present day, none missing, all in binders. Offers? Email selling1@btinternet.com

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WEIGHT LOSS / stop smoking / depression: Free yourself. WWW.U2OPIA.CO.UK Tel: 08717 895 849.

PEOPLE INTERESTED in the last days of Communism and/or mental stimulation. www.lockyourfearsinthesafe.com

EYE BUSINESS

FSA APPROVED NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR is looking for additional rewarding posts. P. O. Box 22114, London SE18 6ZX.

EYE SAY

SPEECHWRITING by Britain's leading professional, Mitch Murray – see page 34

TAKING UP JOGGING? Join the club: www.howsmyjogging.com

SOARING ON STRATEGY but crashing on communication? Grab some Business Presentation Skills. www.powercommunication.co.uk

CAPITAINE: I am missing Steve! Love you lots. Sous-Fifre.

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ONE PRESENCE. TWO PARTS. Wrongdoers handed over to the untouchable One. Possessor of all evidence. Now with unrestricted authority. CT.

WHY IS a major British university trying to suppress the website of a well-known anthropologist? See www.skorupskislaw.com

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EYE EVENTS

CRAIG BROWN will be joined by Ian Hislop, Richard Ingrams, Eleanor Bron and John Sessions to read from his new book Imaginary Friends, at the National Theatre, on Friday 21st January at 6pm. Tickets are available at just £3.50 each by calling 020 7452 3000 or at www.nationaltheatre.org.uk

MAYFAIR SPORTING CLUB. Black tie dinner boxing at The Café Royal. Telephone: 020 7388 5999 or go to www.mayfairsportingclub.com

EYE NEED

COMMUNITY NEEDS FUNDS to fight dubious development. LloydsTSB, S/C: 30-93-76. A/C: 3497142. Please see www.hebdenbridge.co.uk/

YOUR WHIM, MY SALVATION. HSBC, S/C: 40-42-21. A/C: 31163337.

SACKED FOR WHISTLEBLOWING: Desperate for cash to support three kids and a worried but loyal wife. Any help gratefully received. S/C: 40-01-06. A/C: 22073188.

DEDICATED CHARITY WORKER, £15000 in debt, desperate for help. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 30-99-55. A/C: 10268368. Thank you.

WOULD-BE FEMALE TOLKIEN seeks £5,000 to continue quest and complete novel. Eternally grateful. Halifax: S/C: 11-00-70. A/C: 00321008.

HELP, funds required for specialized treatment for my daughter in America to give her quality of life. Nationwide. S/C: 07-00-30. A/C: 61331437.

STITCHED UP / ABANDONED by father, two great kids and cat in financial distress: A plea to help us get back on our feet. S/C: 20-99-21. A/C: 80236659.

ASPIRING YOUNG FEMALE local Labour Politician who needs teacher to overcome nerves when public speaking so that I can progress to national politics. Reply Box 119070.

YOUNG GIFTED CONDUCTOR needs 50k to fund study in USA. loztubb@yahoo.co.uk

FAILED STUDENT TEACHER, mature lady, poor health, divorced, £12,000 debt. S/C: 54-10-27. A/C: 30664381.

I NEED FEEDBACK on advertisers and editorial for www.quality.st richard@redcar.biz

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HUSBAND VERY ILL. I am struggling to support family. Please help as I am desperate. S/C: 30-92-40. A/C: 10193260.

MARTIN AMIS ATE MY BALLS! Writer needs £££. S/C: 60-07-10. A/C: 82152411. hugobaron2000@yahoo.com

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HAVE YOU ARRIVED at a flocci - nauci - nihili - pili - fication of money? Currently I am otherwise and genuinely need your help to create new home: Professional single mother, immoral fraudulent ex. Many thanks. Barclays, S/C: 20-17-35. A/C: 40598852.

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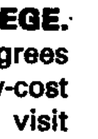
SEX CHANGE and fresh start: 15K desperately needed. Halifax, S/C: 11-00-97. A/C: 00196110.

AN IRISHMAN WRITES: this year I will reach the age my father was when he died a tramp on London's streets. Please help me to express his/our story on film. Funds to Chelsea S/C: 08-60-72. A/C: 06514970. Advice: reply to Box 119275. Thank you.

EYE DRINK



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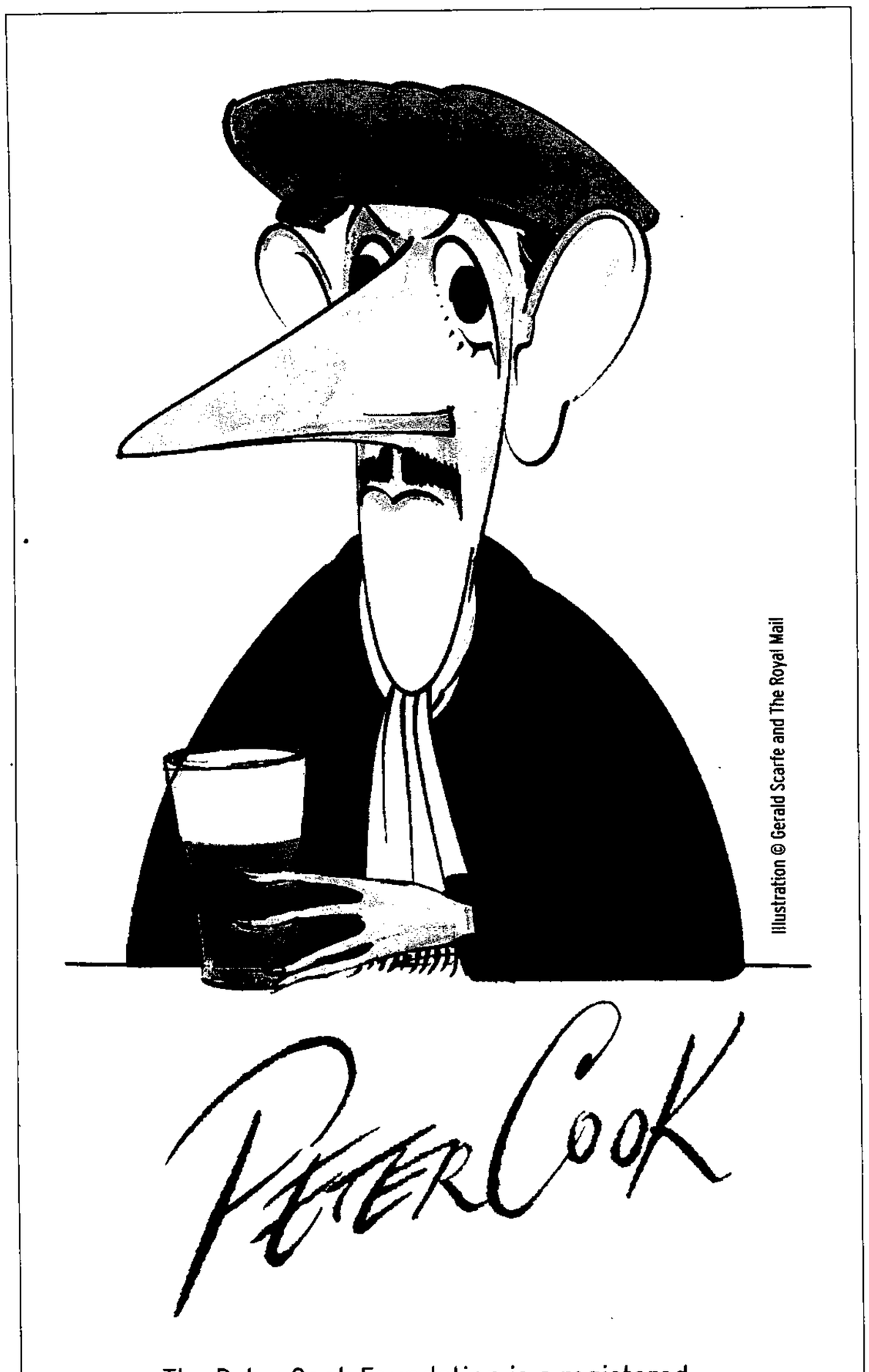

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Peter Cook

The Peter Cook Foundation is a registered charity that aims to be a living memorial to Peter by improving the lives of young adults with learning difficulties.

The Foundation relies on donations and fundraising and always welcomes the help and support of others.

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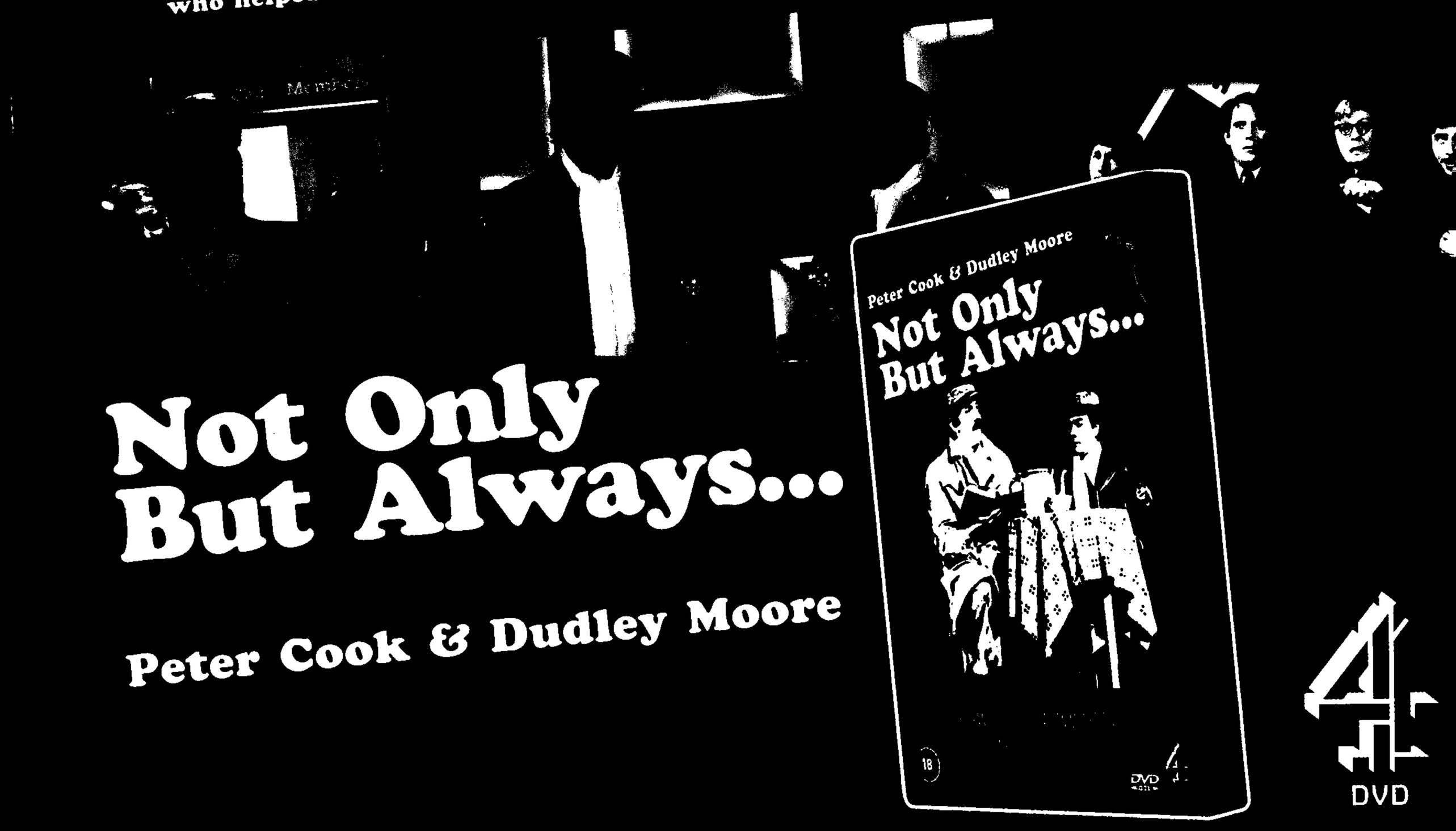

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